Sacred Smellscapes: The Olfactory in Contemporary Christian and Muslim Lebanese Communities

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Abstract.

The cultural anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis perceptively remarked that when odors fade away…narratives, memories, and feelings linger on. They are the remnants of the ephemeral. In tune with her insight, this research engages in the study of the olfactory by paying attention to its engendered effects. In my experimental endeavor, I put forward the concept of "sacred smellscape", arguing that smells can become place-related by cyclical employment. I analyze the construction of these smellscapes in the frame of religious rituals where odors are recurrently used. An engaging environment for this project is the present multiconfessional context of Lebanon. Here various religious communities interact under the authority of a state system carved across confessional lines. The present urban "-scape" of its capital Beirut was the focus of a three-week field research. In this time span, its inhabitants became my interviewees, while its streets, churches and mosques were part of my participatory observations.

Four religious denominations make the focus of this project: Maronite Christianity, Rum Orthodoxy, Reformed Protestantism, and Sunni Islam. More precisely, I pay attention to their ritualistic usage of bukhūr, an Arabic term roughly translated as incense. Firstly, I look into how believers affiliated to one of these confessions experience the fragrant smellscape created by bukhūr. Secondly, I argue that these "-scapes" are multilayered, the religious olfactory being culturally and historically contingent. In case of the latter, I focus on the Lebanese Civil War of 1975-1990 and its lingering imprints on the social fabric and urban topography of Beirut.

The investigation of the cultural dimensions takes the shape of "a one-day journey" in Beirut. To begin with, the reader steps inside the official spaces of worship affiliated to the four religious denominations. The focus here is on how the communities of believers senses and makes sense of bukhūr within prescribed religious rituals. As he steps out, he is immersed into the olfactory culture of post-war Beirut. At this moment, smells stand as witnesses for the fragrant Mediterranean culture and become instruments of social and economic identification and differentiation. Finally, attention shifts to the domestic spaces in Beirut. Here insights are provided into how bukhūr is employed and experienced in private religious practices.

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My sincere gratitude goes to Professor Nadia al-Bagdadi, for her resilient support in my endeavor to study the ephemeral and for allowing me to be creative in my research. Her scholarly interest and personal knowledge of Lebanon have been essential guidelines for my understanding the Eastern Mediterranean culture.

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Note on Transliteration.

The transliteration from Arabic in this paper is conducted according to the guide provided by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). When available, I use the Arabic terms in the form that they are indicated in the IJMRS Word Lists. When these are not provided, I follow the IJMES transliteration chart. The technical terms are italicized and transliterated with diacritical marks. I do not add diacritics or italicize transliterated names of places or persons. To conform as close as possible to common usage, in the case of names of streets and headquarters in Beirut, I use conventional English spelling.

In line with these general directions, below is a short list of transliterations and the forms they are rendered in this paper. This list is not exhaustive as it includes only the terms that I recurrently use in my research:

Achrafieh	sunna
hadith	Sunni
jinn (singular) / jinni (plural)	salat
Qurʾan(ic)	*ṣalāt al-jum`a*
Mecca	shaykh
Muhammad	*umma*
shariʿa	Zarif
Rum	imam
	Shiʿi (n. + adj.); Shiʿa (pl.)

N.B. For matters of research and argumentation, I employ the Arabic term for incense (fragrant substance) and spell it as “bukhūr”.

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Introduction. An Experimental Study in the Olfactory[1].

"For people could close their eyes to greatness, to horror, to beauty, and their ears to melodies or deceiving words. But they could not escape scent. For scent was a brother of breath."[2] This fragment from Patrick Süskind's classic novel *Perfume. The Story of a Murder* reflects the intrinsically intimate nature of smells. Fragrant or foul, they penetrate our most inner being and awake deep-rooted emotions and sensorial reactions. At the same time, odors have an intrusive character as each life-sustaining breath inhales invisible scented particles. Yet, just as Jean-Baptiste Grenouille - Süskind's protagonist – was to discover, odors have an ephemeral character. In the absence of their material source, the disembodied essence of scent cannot be pinned on paper, clasped in one's hand or stored in a perfume bottle.

The intimate, intrusive and ethereal characteristics of the fragrant have made it the perfect candidate for symbolizing the transcendent and Its sacred realm. On the one side, it reflects the paradox of the presence and the absence of the divine. On the other side, it mirrors the intensely intimate, yet short-lasting nature of religious experiences. In this frame, different religions have traditionally employed aromatic essences in their ceremonials to create a "sacred atmosphere" or to symbolize an "odor of sanctity".[3] Myrrh, frankincense, camphor and musk easily come to mind as examples of fragrant substances with a long history of religious usage. For centuries, they have acted as *liaisons* between the *here below* and the *there above*. Their olfactive perception has engendered a sense of communion with the divine and between members of various religious communities. Thus, the olfactory

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[1] Olfactory is a technical term which encompasses both the physical activity (the verb: to smell, to sniff) and the agents (the nouns: smells, odors, fragrances).
[2] Patrick Süskind, *Perfume. The Story of a Murderer,* trans. J.E. Woods (New York: Pocket, [1985]1987), 189.
[3] Gale P. Largey and David R. Watson, "The Sociology of Odors," *American Journal of Sociology*, 77:6 (1972): 1021-1034.

became a means of perceiving the sacred, the sensorium solving the ontological tension of communication between Man and God.[4]

At this point, a question arises. How can one research the "sacred olfactory" of others? Smells in general are hard to study, categorize or even talk about because of their nature and lack of specialized vocabulary. Yet, the olfactory is part of what the British anthropologist Tim Ingold calls "our lived, everyday involvement in the world".[5] It is a way of sensing and making sense of the surrounding environment and our emplacement in it. When fleeting odors evaporate into thin air, it is the engendered narratives, feelings and practices that linger on. They are the remnants of our habitual olfactive experiences and they represent the source material for this seemingly impossible research on the ephemeral. In other words, the olfactory can be inquired into through the effects that it stimulates.

This investigation becomes even more engaging when applied in the frame of olfactory religious practices. Here rituals perfected by centuries of tradition and practice incorporate a seasonal procession of fragrant smells. By their cyclical usage, they create sacred islands within day-to-day existence, where networks of symbols are collectively enacted, recognized and understood.[6] Enmeshed in these networks, odors become carriers of messages that stimulate the human sensorium and trigger prescribed patterns of actions and feelings. It is these olfactory sensual "–scapes" that make the focus of this research. Arguing for what I call sacred smellscapes, I comparatively research into the contemporary usage of fragrances in different religious practices. I explore how these fragrances are ritually used, sensorially experienced and cognitively understood by believers and their communities.

I locate my experimental research in the Eastern Mediterranean region, an area characterized by a dynamic interplay of Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions, on the

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[4] Webb Keane, "The Evidence of the Senses and the Materiality of Religion," *JRAI*, 14 (2008): 110-127.
[5] Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," *World Archeology* 25(2), 1993: 152.
[6] Lucienne A. Roubin, "Fragrant Signals and Festive Spaces in Eurasia," in *The Smell Culture Reader*, ed. Jim Drobnick (Oxford: Berg - Oxford International Publishers Ltd., 2006), 128.

background of a Greco-Roman Late Antiquity legacy.[7] This area is also a historical and geographical space where aromatic fragrant substances have been produced and traded since ancient times. From this rich palette of scented ingredients, my inquiry revolves around a specific case: the usage of bukhūr - roughly translated as incense - in different Eastern Christian and Muslim practices. The history of this fragrant essence stretches back to the pre-Islamic Arabian kingdom of Sabaʾ, where sophisticated cultures thrived from the trade with aromatics.[8] Today, bukhūr is well-known for its biblical reference as one of the gifts brought to infant Jesus by the Magi. Its physical source is *Boswellia sacra*, a shrub native to Saudi Arabia and the horn of Africa. Precious crystal resins are harvested from the oozing wounds of these shrubs, processed and usually burnt for its steaming fragrant smoke.[9] Yet, its employment can take various forms in different religious traditions, from fumigations and perfume, to soap bars and scented oils. This multifarious usage is rendered by the Arabic word "bukhūr", aspect which prompted me to use the Arabic term for this research, rather than the restrictive English translation of "incense".[10]

A case study relevant for the wide-ranging forms and employment of bukhūr is present-day Lebanon, home to more than eighteen recognized religious denominations.[11] The majority of these communities are representative of the thriving aromatic heritage of the Eastern Mediterranean region as they extensively use aromatics in their collective ceremonials and individual religious practices. Acknowledging the diversity of religious beliefs and performance, my research focuses on four denominations whose traditions and

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[7] Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 80-92.
[8] "encens," *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, eds. Henri Leclercq and Fernand Cabrol, (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1923), 2-4.
[9] Ibid., 2-18.
[10] For an example of the diversity of bukhūr, see *Appendices*, no. 1
[11] The eighteen officially recognized confessions in Lebanon include four Muslim denominations and twelve Christian ones, the Druze and Judaism. For further details, see United States Department of State, "2013 Report on International Religious Freedom – Lebanon" (2014), accessed April 1, 2015. http://www.refworld.org/docid/53d90755d.html.

histories are strongly connected to this country and the Mediterranean region more generally: Maronite Christianity, Rum Orthodoxy, Sunni Islam and the much more recent Eastern Reformed Protestantism.

The present multi-confessional environment of Lebanon is another aspect that renders this country by the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea an engaging case study. Once with its declaration as a sovereign state in 1943, Lebanon became a confessional polity, where a modicum of toleration was strived for by officially recognizing ethno-religious pluralism as the state's foundation. In this sense, confessionalism (*ta'ifiyya*) is at the core of the governing system of the modern Lebanese nation-state. According to this principle, legislative, administrative, and judiciary posts are proportionally assigned according to a formula of confessional representation.[12] For instance, the highest official state powers are divided among the main three confessions: the President has to be a Maronite, the Prime Minister has to be a Sunni and the President of the Parliament has to be a Shiʿi.[13] Thus, religion is strongly enmeshed in Lebanon's historical and political development as a modern state, expressive of a vacillation over sectarian divisions and national unity, inclusion and exclusion, peace and conflict.

My research focuses on the aftermath of the 1975-1990 Civil War, when the affiliation to one's religious community became a central marker of political and social identification for the Lebanese.[14] This identification along confessional lines was complemented by a "territorialization of space" during the war, where a religious denomination would either lay claim over or be ascribed to a neighborhood, an area or a region. The 1990 Taif Agreement ended the civil war, reinstated the confessional system of government and accommodated it to the present Muslim majority. Yet, even though it

[12] Samir Kassir, *Beirut,* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 444.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ana Peleikis, "Shifting Identities, Reconstructing Boundaries. The Case of Multi-Confessional Locality in Post-War Lebanon," *Die Welt des Islams*, 41 (2001): 428.

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provided the basis for a ceasefire, this accord did not wipe away the vicissitudes of war. Fifteen years of demographic displacements and confessionally grounded violence took their toll on the Lebanese and on the urban and rural topography of their “home”.

Such is the case with the capital of Lebanon, the port city of Beirut. The confessionally - defined identities and territories engendered during the war linger on in the post-1990 social encounters. They are publicly expressed through sacred rituals and symbols used as instruments in recurrent “turf war” of confessional loyalties and territorial affiliations. They are imprinted in the urban “-scape” of this polis too, where neighborhoods and areas are recurrently branded as either “Christian”, “Muslim” or “mixed”.

Conversely, this Arab metropolis has also been a confessional safe haven across its history, a fertile environment for peaceful interaction between its varied religious communities. Its development as a flourishing Levantine port stands under the sign of diversity. Here a wide range of aromatics have been traded between the Far East and the European continent, exchanges which engendered bustling encounters of different customs, ideas and religious beliefs. Its rich history as a Levantine port, its socio-cultural diversity and its post-war urban landscape with confessional imprints make modern-day Beirut an engaging case to research.[15] In this sense, this city was the focus of a three-week field research that I undertook in Lebanon, its methodological specificities being developed in Chapter I, *Theoretical and Methodological Considerations.*

The Thesis Statement.

In the light of the aforementioned, the aim of this study is to inquiry into how these four religious denominations (Rum Orthodoxy, Maronite Christianity, Sunni Islam and Eastern Reformed Protestantism) mobilize their sacred smellscapes in post-1990 Beirut. My

[15] For further developments on the particularities of Lebanon / Beirut as a case study see Chapter II, *A Tale of Beirut: Between a Safe Haven and a Battleground.* Also, the case of Beirut as an Arab metropolis is analyzed at length in Chapter IV*, Bukhūr and the Everyday Smellscapes of Beirut.*

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working hypothesis is that they act and react to each other, their olfactory religious practices being shaped by the cultural and socio-historical environment. The argumentation revolves around the collective and individual practices that imply the usage of bukhūr - a substance indigenous to the region and extensively used by the majority of confessions in Beirut. Firstly, I analyze the ritualized employment and the sensorial experience of bukhūr, revealing how they are shaped by inter- and intra-denominational interaction. Secondly, I argue that the construction of the four sacred smellscapes is historically and culturally contingent. The researcher must step out from the sacred into the profane and research the dialectical relation between the socio-political status and the olfactory. In the case of post-1990 Beirut, the enhanced socio-political identification across confessional lines is reflected in the sacred olfactory of the Rum Orthodox, the Maronites, the Sunni Muslims, and the Reformed Protestants.

Lastly, a short apologetics is required prior to engaging in the methodological and conceptual frames of this experimental research. A three-week field study undertaken in Beirut is not a sufficient time frame to properly immerse in the olfactory culture of this polis. The multi-layered nature of smelling, the intricate history of Lebanese confessionalism and the specificities of the Eastern Mediterranean region are elements that require a long-term scholarly engagement. Consequently, here I do not aim at offering a comprehensive, clear-cut answer to my working hypothesis. I rather provide insights into how the sacred olfactory attunes to the cultural-historical environment of Beirut and translates into confessional coexistence or strife. These insights are meant to build upon a more cohesive future research on this topic.

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Chapter I. Theoretical and Methodological Considerations.

What are the specific methodological challenges of research on the sensorium? How does one carry empirical research on the sense of smell and its ethereal agents, the odors? The aim of this chapter is to address these well-founded hesitations. It focuses on questions of methodology and brings forth existing interdisciplinary scholarship on the sensorial in general and the olfactory in particular. After an insight into stimulating theories that have shaped the agenda of this inchoate field of research, I develop on the conceptual framework and the methodology employed in my study on sacred smellscapes.

I.1. Disciplinary Approaches in Sensorial Studies.

The state of the existing literature in the scholarly research of the olfactory is characterized by a modest yet varied palette of sensory methodologies and empirical studies. A pioneering and by now a classic study on the social history of odors has been *Le Miasme et la Jonquille: L'Odorat et L'Imaginaire Social, 18-19e Siècles*,[16] written by the French historian Alain Corbin in 1982. Endeavoring to explain the "deodorized" character of 19th - century France, he researched into how the lack of odors came to be a trademark of hygiene in the French society of that period. Four years later, this socio-historic approach to odors had a literary counterpart in Patrick Süskind's masterpiece *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (1986). The novel traces the obsessive and inescapable force of the fragrant by focusing on the lively embodied experiences of a gifted novice perfumer in 18th - century France. This literary exploration of the olfactory finds a counterpart in Sun'allah Ibrahim's *That Smell* (*Tilka al-rā'iḥa*), an Egyptian novella representative for Arab modernism in literature. Published in 1966, it traces the olfactive minutiae of an ordinary life in the urban "–scape" of Egypt, during the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser.

[16] In 1986, it was translated in English as *The Foul and the Fragrant. Odor and the French Imagination*.

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Yet, it was in the field of anthropology where the olfactory as subject of study found a mature environment for development. In the 1980s-1990s, anthropology of the senses became a full-fledged sub-discipline. Among the cross-cultural and historical projects that settled the agenda for this new sub-discipline, one can mention Howes' *Varieties of Sensory Experience* (1991), Seremetakis' *The Senses Still. Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (1996) or the work of the cultural historian Constance Classen: *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (1993). These pioneering scholars kindled a revisionary movement arguing for interdisciplinary attention to the senses as subject of study. Their reaction aligned to the mid-1980s "material turn" in the social sciences and the humanities, a paradigm change where the world of objects and embodied experiences challenged the primacy of concepts, values and ideologies as movers of history.[17]

In 2005, in the wide-ranging compendium *Empire of the Senses. The Sensual Culture Reader*, Howes coined the term "sensual revolution" to argue for a rediscovery of the body as an instrument in understanding culture.[18] Building on the works of Alain Corbin and Marshall McLuhan, he convincingly argues that without looking at how senses are "culturally attuned", one cannot properly research the dynamic interaction between the body and mediated experiences. Yet, his "revolutionary" approach was also met with criticism. Tim Inglod justifiably reproached Howes for paying too much attention to these cultural models and values, thus shadowing the sensorial experience and perception of the individual.[19] These two sides of the debate have been creatively intertwined in recent interdisciplinary research on sensory perception, practice and culture. One such innovative

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[17] Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer, eds., *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 4-5.
[18] David Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2005), 1-20.
[19] Tim Inglod, *The Perception of the Environment* (London: Routledge, 2000), 156-285.

research project has been Charles Hirschkind's *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. Here he explores how cassette sermons, a popular Islamic media in Egypt, have aided in the ethical self-improvement of pious Muslims by stimulating diverse synesthetic and emotional experiences.[20]

I.2. The (Sacred) Olfactory - The "Cinderella" of the Story.

In this context where the senses have been in the spotlight of recent research in social sciences and humanities, I would argue that the olfactory has been the Cinderella of the story. Given the primacy of attention on the visual and the aural, the study of the sense of smell and its ethereal agents is still an inchoate area of research.

Among the scarce literature dealing exclusively with the study of the olfactory, one can mention *The Smell Culture Reader.*[21] This interdisciplinary comprehensive work offers a much needed overview of the functions of odors in defining religious, social or cultural identities. As branding agents, moral mediators, purifying agents or symbols of the transcendent, odors aid in the construction of social status, personal identity and cultural traditions. The medical historian Jonathan Reinarz historicizes this diversity in his 2014 panoramic historiography of the olfactory from classical antiquity until modernity: *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell.* This cross-disciplinary study offers valuable insights into how peoples across time and space develop different osmologies to make sense of the surrounding environment, themselves or the transcendent. Also, the synthesizing character of the study addresses the relations of the olfactory with race, gender, trade,

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[20] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
[21] Jim Drobnick, *The Smell Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg - Oxford International Publishers Ltd., 2006)

politics or the sociocultural, in the attempt to challenge a narrative of a historical devaluation of the olfactory.[22]

The sociability potential of the olfactory has been emphasized by the cultural historian Constance Classen and the sociologist Kevin Low. Looking at odors as signifiers contingent upon different cultural norms, values and practices, they examine the power of the olfactory in setting boarders between the alike *us* and the different *them*. Both scholars persuasively claim that smells are not only agents of self-identification, but also instruments employed in the process of social, political or cultural "othering". However, Low goes beyond this duality to research how the diversity of the olfactory contributes to the structuring of moral and social hierarchies. In this sense, two of his articles relevant for this research are "Ruminations on Smell as Sociocultural Phenomenon" and "Presenting the Self, the Social Body, and the Olfactory: Managing Smells in Everyday Life Experiences."[23]

Another quality of smell that has recently received scholarly attention is its "ability" to evoke the past. Its dialectical relation with memory was researched by Nadia Seremetakis in *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, a work that creatively combines belletristic passages with scholarly analysis. The sociologists Dennis D. Waskul and Phillip Vannini also put forth challenging studies on sensuous rituals, where the olfactory and memory are legitimizing agents in the development of a sensuous self.[24]

Yet, a panoramic look at the current state of the art of this multi-disciplinary research on the odors reveals a scarcity of studies on the sacred olfactory – the role and

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[22] Jonathan Reinarz, *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

[23] Constance Classen "The Odor of the Other: Olfactory Symbolism and Cultural Categories," *Ethos,* 20 (1992): 133-166; Kevin Low, "Ruminations on Smell as Sociocultural Phenomenon," *Current Sociology* 53 (2005): 397-417 and "Presenting the Self, the Social Body, and the Olfactory: Managing Smells in Everyday Life Experiences," *Sociological Perspectives*, 49:4 (2006): 607-631.

[24] Dennis D. Waskul, Phillip Vannini, Janelle Wilson, "The Aroma of Recollection: Olfaction, Nostalgia, and the Shaping of the Sensuous Self," *Senses and Society* 4 (2009): 5-22.

nature of odors in religious beliefs, practices and traditions. This aspect is part of a larger framework of disregard for the sacred sensorium across disciplines, including the field of religious studies. In the frame of a spirit-body dualism, considerable theological and scholarly attention has been given to belief. This emphasis has had a downplaying effect on the material and the sensorial as guiding tools in the study of religion.[25]

In cases where due attention was paid to the sensorium, the primacy of the visual and the aural overshadowed the role of the other senses in the religious synesthetic experiences of the sacred. Such is the case with the sense of smell, its ephemeral agents – the odors - and their material basis. This discrepancy was the incentive for Susan Ashbrook Harvey's *Scenting Salvation. Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (2006). In her comprehensive yet scattered monograph, she weaves a vision on the olfactory perception in early Christianity by appealing to liturgical practices, literary imagery, medical treaties and theological discourse. Another prolific writer who restores the taxis of olfactory perception in the Pantheon of senses is the French historian Béatrice Caseau. Her historical investigations on the cultural, commercial and religious spectrum of the olfactory give valuable insights into the "*realia* of ancient olfactory practices."[26] Yet, both scholars limit their research to ancient and late antiquity Christianity in the Mediterranean region, the research on the sacred olfactory in other spatial and temporal frames being a *terra incognita.*

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I.3. The Conceptual Frame: Smellscape, Sensational Form, Memory.

In light of the previous literature, this research contributes to the inchoate, yet promising investigation of the olfactory in general and the sacred olfactory in particular. In this experimental endeavor, I focus on a performative direction of research, drawing on

[25] For a more elaborate argumentation, see Houtman and Meyer, *Things;* Sally M. Promey, ed., *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New York: Yale University Press, 2014).
[26] Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation. Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 6.

theories of ritual, memory, sensorial engagement and linguistic apprehension. Yet, the lack of appropriate vocabulary on smell requires the researcher to be creative in developing conceptual and methodological frameworks.

The main term that makes the focus of this study is “sacred smellscape”. In its conceptual construction, I build on Douglas Porteous’ study of smells as place-related. By repetitive usage, odors end up fitting in a certain space, their presence being expected and their lack being felt. In this way, a smellscape is created.[27] I import this concept into the field of religious studies to denote the sacred spaces created by the cyclical usage of fragranced substances in religious rituals. I thus put forward the concept of “sacred smellscape”. In my research, I use the concept of sacred in two ways. Firstly, I go back to its etymology of *hagios,* referring to the elements that are being ritually purified and protected by the transcendent (e.g. human body, ritual objects, incense, books, and places).[28] Secondly, I look at the sacred as a space of mediation, where the communication between two ontologically-different agents (human and divine) is made possible.[29] It is in this space where the objects consecrated to the divine become mediators that make possible the knowledge and experience of the divine.

Yet, while Porteous applied his innovative concept to geographical space, I plan to expand the potential of this concept. In this sense, by “sacred smellscape” I refer not only to the sacrality of the physical space created through the cyclical usage of fragrant substances, but also to the body as a space for the sacred in terms of performative actions. Through these olfactive religious practices, the body acquires new powers and protections and a state

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[27] J. Douglas Porteous, “Smellscape,” in Drobnick, *The Smell Culture,* 89-106.
[28] Aurélien Liarte, “Le Corps, Territoire Politique du Sacré,” *Noesis* [Online], 12 (2007), accessed January 20, 2015, http://noesis.revues.org/1343.
[29] Birgit Meyer, ed., *Aesthetic Formation. Media, Religion, and the Senses* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 11.

of well-being and purification.[30] Thus, it can mirror the level of closeness or distance from the divine, it can be an expression of allegiance to a particular religious community or a reflection of hierarchies of power. In other words, I perceive the body also as a potential territory of the sacred. It can be fully charged with pure and impure attributes, with appropriate and inappropriate behavior, with attitudes and actions that defile or purify. The body becomes a fragment of space where access is denied, allowed or transgressed, which is invested with physical and representational attributes by a community, be it religious, social, political.[31]

The work of the cultural anthropologist Birgit Meyer proves useful in my analysis of the cyclical character of the fragrant religious rituals, their authorization within the religious traditions in question and their impact on the pious believers.[32] She brings to the fore the importance of senses in religious experiences and practices, at the same time emphasizing their socially and culturally constructed character. In this sense, she coins the term "sensational forms"[33], which she defines as authorized patterns of religious feeling and practice which the practitioners engage in to have access to the transcendent. "They are part of a specific religious aesthetics, which governs a sensory engagement of humans with the divine and each other and generates particular sensibilities."[34] These modes are repeatable patters of feeling and action, which shape the believer into a religious subject.

I also find inspiration in a classic of social anthropology: *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966). Here the witty British anthropologist

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[30] Françoise Aubaile-Sallenave "Bodies, Odors and Perfumes in Arab Muslim Societies," in Drobnick, *The Smell Culture*, 391-399.
[31] For a more elaborate analysis on the body as a representational space, see Liarte, "Le Corps," http://noesis.revues.org/1343.
[32] I define the believer as a follower of a particular religious tradition, who engages in its prescribed performative rituals and abides by the beliefs and norms promoted by the authoritative structures of that tradition.
[33] Birgit Meyer, "Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism's Sensational Forms," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 109 (2010): 741-763.
[34] Ibid.,751.

Mary Douglas explores how rituals, symbolic actions and practices construct the worldview of "primitive" and "modern" societies. She develops a rather dichotomic analytical framework where rituals of purification and cleanliness assure order and tame the polluting potential of the "matter out of place".[35] She argues that these notions of pollution and purification stand at the core of religious beliefs and practices, shaping the values and the behavior patterns of religious communities. This framework will prove useful when engaging with the potential and effects of bukhūr in the religious practices of the four denominations under research.

Moreover, two other core concepts employed in my research are memory and language. Remembering has an idealizing character: firstly, because the events or objects remembered no longer exist in physical form; secondly, because of its inherent evaluative and nostalgic attributes. In other words, one makes sense of a sensation by remembering feelings. The types of feelings that memories entail depend on the biography and the sensual habits of the person remembering. When an individual senses and makes sense of different odors, she does not only encounter a feeling but also contexts grounded in space, time, and social networks.[36] In other words, the *I* in the *now* and *here* recollects an *I* in the *then* and *there*, an actions creatively coined by Howes as "transubstantiation".[37] For example, when I think of the first time I smelled incense, I remember myself in a church, during Christmas liturgy, surrounded by my family. Memory functions multisensorially, the analytical practice of making-sense and the corporeal experience of sensing reinforcing each other in the process of remembering. Ephemeral odors not only turn into memories, but also into

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[35] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York and London: Routledge, 1966), 35-36.
[36] Waskul, "The Aroma of Recollection," 13.
[37] David Howes, "Olfaction and Transition: An Essay on the Ritual Uses of Smell," *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 24 (1987): 399.

long-lasting narratives, as Nadia Seremetakis perceptively stated.[38] Through these narratives, individual sensorial experiences can be collectively shared, understood and passed from one generation to the other.

I.4. The Sacred Smellscapes of Beirut: Research Methodology.

Methodologically, I adopt an anthro-historical interdisciplinary approach by combining primary and secondary written sources with an experiential research field. The olfactory and the sacred are two areas of research whose holistic study must incorporate the lived experience. On the one hand, this requirement is the result of their ephemeral character and the personal nature of perception. At a first glance, these two aspects would make the research of the sacred olfactory a futile endeavor: the transcendent / odors cannot be grasped but lived and each sensorial experience is unique. Yet, I strongly believe that a researcher can at least aspire to get as close as possible in understanding these experiences. One way is through the stories people tell themselves about themselves - about how they sensorially experience, understand, remember and re-live the sacred. In order for them to talk about such personal experience, the researcher must interact with his respondents, build valuable connections, participate and/or observe their ceremonials and everyday practices. In other words, he must be *there* and *with them.*

A holistic understanding of these live experienced, either individual or collective, requires the researcher to take a step further and look at the structures of daily social, cultural and political life. The specificities of these structures do have a history and, as cliché as it may sound, one must look into the past to understand the present. In the case of Lebanon, attention must be paid to its political history as a nation state, to examples of inter-denominational cooperation or conflict, to how the 1975-1990 Civil War impacted these

[38] Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still. Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 5.

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interactions in the present or to the development of incense trade in the Mediterranean area. The lived experience of a believer is not an isolated phenomenon, but enmeshed in a network of religious and cultural traditions that gain their authority and institutional recognition across time and space. Thus, a researcher must adopt the roles of both a historian and an anthropologist, each role bearing a keen eye on the workings of the other.

My study is the outcome of a three-week research in Beirut, carried out between December 2014 and January 2015. Here I particularly focused on four religious denominations, representative for the religious diversity of this polis: Maronite Christianity, Rum (Greek) Orthodoxy, Reformed Protestantism, and Sunni Islam. One frame of analysis is between the generically speaking Muslim and Christian practices where bukhūr is used. Yet, taking into consideration the denominational variety within each of these two Abrahamic religions, the four denominations are also treated and analyzed as *sui generis* cases. The liturgical traditions of the Maronites and the Rum (Greek) Orthodox share both differences and similarities in their usage and symbolistic of bukhūr. On the one hand, the Maronite Church follows an Eastern Syriac rite combined with Latin elements, while the Rum (Greek) Orthodox Church abides by the Byzantine rite. On the other hand, they share theological principles such as the symbolistic of bukhūr as the "odor of Christ".[39]

The Reformed Protestants are a particularly interesting case study. While Protestant theology rejects religious performances that sensorially stimulate the believer, its Eastern branch developed in a cultural space where fragrant substances are predominantly used in both religious and ordinary practices. I chose the case of Sunni Islam as it provides another perspective on the usage and interpretation of bukhūr. Since Islam does not incorporate a collective religious ritual as elaborately choreographed as the liturgy, I shift perspective here

[39] This aspect will further be developed in Chapter III, subchapter 1, "The Transfiguration of Bukhūr: Rum Orthodox and Maronite Rituals."

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to the usage of fragrant essences in individual and folk religious practices. I decided not to include the case of Shiʿa in Beirut for several reasons: my research period did not coincide with a major Shiʿi religious celebration and there is an extensive literature devoted to this denomination.[40] Also, it proved difficult to establish relevant connections with this confession in Beirut, during my relatively short period of stay.

My field methodology had a qualitative character, relying on semi – structured interviews and participatory observations as instruments of research. I completed twelve interviews, each ranging from 40 min. to 1h 30 min.[41] Ten of these were individual-based, while two were conducted with more than two persons at a time. As a starting point, I designed a list of guiding questions in English and in French, which was thematically structured along the cover terms of space, rituals, agents, fragrant essences, and ceremonial objects. I used this list as an interview guide, emphasizing more on a free-flow and two-way communication with the respondents. I encouraged them to talk freely and divert from my pre-established questions when relevant subjects were touched upon. In this way, other relevant questions were raised during the interviews and the respondents felt more comfortable in talking about sensitive issue (e.g. the 1975-1990 Civil War).

I conducted interviews in English and French and was assisted by a translator in cases where interviewees spoke only Arabic. Since I have a beginner's level in Arabic, the language barrier occasionally proved to be a challenge. This was not so much the case during interviews as most Beiruti inhabitants speak fluently French and/or English. Yet, it was the case during my participation in different religious practices in Arabic (liturgies, prayers, and celebrations), when the solemnity or the festive character of the events did not

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[40] For this topic, see Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shiʿi Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[41] For a detailed list of the interviewees, see the *Bibliography* section. For matters of confidentiality, all the interviews are stored in my personal archive and the names of the respondents are changed.

allow for a proper translation. In order to cope with this difficulty, I recorded the events and later asked for help with the translation.

Moreover, I opted for a varied category of respondents, including priests, reverends, Sunni shaykhs and practicing believers. The professions of the believers ranged from university professor and electrician, to medical engineer and perfumer. Taken into consideration my relatively short period of stay in Beirut, part of these connections and interviews were established beforehand, thus allowing me to focus also on participatory observations. The two most important requirements in the respondent profile were religious affiliation and residency. Firstly, they had to be affiliated to one the four religious denominations and be an active believer by regularly engaging in collective and/or individual religious rituals. In this sense, six of the respondents were part of the Christian ecclesiastical structures or the informal Muslim social hierarchies, while ten were practicing believers. Secondly, I looked for individuals who had been living in Beirut for more than ten years and/or experienced the 1975-1990 Civil War in Lebanon.

Inspired by Sara Parks' *Doing Sensory Ethnography*,[42] I consider the interviews as a source of several levels of knowledge. *Firstly – verbally.* They offer insights into these olfactory sensations through the descriptive and self-narrative discourse of the interviewees. With this in mind, I pay attention to how respondents characterize their sensorial experience and the metaphors they use to describe it. I also look into how they describe their usage and experience of bukhūr by comparison with the religious practices of the other confessions.

Secondly - through other embodied ways of knowing such as practice and exemplification. In this sense, I would ask my respondents to reenact several practices where they would use bukhūr. I also added an elicitation characteristic, intentionally presenting the interviewed subjects with stories in order to trigger sensorial and emotional responses.

[42] Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (London: Sage Publications, 2009).

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Thirdly - the context itself as a source of knowledge. The material and the sensorial environment where the interviews took place were a guiding element into the sensorial everyday of the respondents. The places where my interviews were scheduled ranged from churches and mosques (Saint George Maronite Cathedral, National Evangelical Church of Beirut, Saint Mary's Orthodox Church of Dormition, Muhammad Al-Amin Mosque), to personal homes. Taking into consideration my status as a "foreigner" in the Lebanese culture, I let my respondents chose the place where they would feel comfortable and at ease in communicating, while I adjusted to their environment, their pace of talking, their habits, day-to-day activities or ceremonial behavior. In this sense, I would hold interviews and have informal conversations in-between Christmas dinners or the five daily prayers (salat), after the liturgy in a church or the congregational Friday prayer (*ṣalāt al-jum`a*) in a mosque.

Moreover, the interviews were complemented by participatory observations, where I witnessed practical demonstrations of religious rituals that use bukhūr in different places of worship. As an analysis material from these participant observations, I have photographs and audio-recordings of religious celebrations. The period of research was specifically chosen to include important religious celebrations from the four studied religious denominations. On the one hand, I attended the religious services and gatherings of the Rum (Greek) Orthodox believers, the Maronites and the Reformed Protestants during Christmas (December 25-26, 2014), New Year (January, 1, 2015) and Epiphany (January, 6, 2015). On the other hand, I took part in several religious celebrations of the Sunni Muslims such as the Birth of the Prophet (*Mawlid al-Nabī* – January 3, 2015) or the Friday congregational prayers. In cases where it was possible, I was accompanied by a translator who would give me valuable information in order to understand the rituals unfolding before my eyes.

In order to get a glimpse into the "olfactory everyday" of my respondents, I crossed the boarders of the religious space and entered into the urban public one. I explored Beirut's

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neighborhoods in order to "get a feeling" of their confessionally-determined character. In my aim to see how this character is publicly expressed, I researched into the dynamics of the religious, social or economic identities of Beiruti inhabitants. For instance, I explored neighborhoods that would generally be termed Christian (e.g. Achrafieh) or Muslim (Zarif) because of their high level of confessional homogeneity.

I.5. The Sacred Smellscapes of Beirut: Analytical Methodology.

In my research of the construction of these sacred smellscapes, I develop a three-level analysis. Of course these three stages are strongly intertwined in reality and their interdependency will be reflected in the following research chapters. It is only in the interest of analytical clarity that I differentiate between these levels.

Firstly - *the practice and experience of the believer*. I focus on the biography of the believer undergoing the sensorial experience, perceiving the body as the ground for the experience and as a source of knowledge. Here I align with Brigit Meyer's definition of *aisthesis* as "our total sensory experience of the world and out sensitive knowledge of it."[43] People sense (physical action) and make sense (mental activity) of the world they live in, thus becoming both the object and the subject of somatic sensations, their cognitive interpretation and their linguistic symbolization. [44] When repeated in time and space, these sensations give a sense of emplacement and result in embodied ways of knowing. In turn, this leads to the development of a performative skill and a ritualized attitude taken from the past and enacted in the present. These embodied experiences lead to the development of a "sensuous self" which is "performative, reflective, and perceptive".[45]

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[43] Meyer, *Aesthetic Formation,* 6; main source: Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, "Aesthetics," in David Morgan, ed., *Key Words in Religion, Media, and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 21.
[44] Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 61-74.
[45] Waskul, "The Aroma of Recollection," 6.

In this frame, I explore if and how bukhūr is ritually used and sensorially experienced by the believers of the four religious denominations. In order to achieve this, I look at the discourses employed during the interviews in order to mobilize or express these embodied ways of knowing and experiencing. I analyze their ways and reasons for using bukhūr during private and public religious rituals and how they describe the embodied experiences triggered by this fragrance.

Secondly - *the religious traditions*. Emplaced olfactory experiences are to be understood within a larger framework that goes beyond the immediacy of the actual practice. This individual-based analysis of the olfactory cannot avoid "the conditions that shape the feelings, senses, spaces and performances of belief, that is, the material coordinates or forms of religious practice."[46] Sensations also have a collective aspect, where communal agreement is reached on the appropriate embodied emotions, affects and experiences.[47] These formations materialize the individual somatic work, develop and affirm the dominant sensorial order of a religious community. They also have a repetitive performative character, where an individual grounded in time and space attunes to a collective form of perceiving, experiencing and understanding the divine. Also, "in sensing something, one makes sense of it by means of ritual and habit"[48]. Through rituals, sensual reactions become sensual habits and through recollection I remember myself anchored in a particular time and space. Thus, "the present attends to what is recalled and the past aids in structuring the present".[49]

In Christianity and Islam, the authority of rituals steams from their traditions grounded in canonical works and authorized performative rituals. For the three Christian

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[46] Houtman and Meyer, *Things,* 3.
[47] Constance Classen, "Sweet Colors, Fragrant Songs: Sensory Models of the Andes and the Amazon," *The Senses and Society*, 1(1990): 722.
[48] Waskul, "The Aroma of Recollection," 17.
[49] Ibid.

denominations, the liturgy, through its collective performative character, sets the guiding lines for the symbolic usage of bukhūr and for "living" the olfactory experience. For Sunni Islam, no full-fledged theology of the usage of bukhūr exists, yet the practice and tradition of its usage and symbolism steams from canonical works such as *fiqh* or hadith. I also expect to get valuable insights from my interviews with the institutional representatives of the four religious denominations (reverend, priest, and shaykh) and from my participatory observations of different religious celebrations in Beirut.

Thirdly - *the cultural - historical framework*. I argue for a further enlargement of the framework and discourse, crossing the boarders of the sacred and including the cultural and historical dimensions. According to Nadia Seremetakis, perceptual completion is achieved only when sensory experience is intertwined with culture practice[50]; thus allowing us to see, smell or hear more than with the physical eye, nose or ear. Once the sensorial categories used by the respondents are placed within a larger network of socio-political structures, the "sensory profile"[51] of a culture emerges. Thus, sensory perception becomes a relation between the perceived, the surrounding material culture and the structures of organization.

In this sense, aromatics have been an essential "ingredient" in the social patterns and traditions of Eastern Mediterranean cultures, whether used as precious commodities in daily life, as sacred substances in religious rituals or cooking ingredients. From the fragrant odor of Arabic coffee and jasmine perfume, to the foul smell of poverty and the uneducated, odors may become symbols of cultural expression. They are contingent upon the values, the norms and practices of a culture. In order to understand how smells mediate social interaction and reflect social and economic rankings in Beirut, I shall mainly rely on the

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[50] Seremetakis, *The Senses Still,* 7-8.

[51] Constance Classen, David Howes "Sounding Sensory Profiles", in *Varieties of Sensory Experience, ed.* David Howes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991): 257-288.

insights of my participatory observations and the interviews as sources of analysis. I also pay attention to the olfactory sense and its ethereal agents as historically attuned. Here I research into the narratives on the 1975-1990 Civil War and the aftermath period, paying particular attention to inter- and intra- denominational communication. This analysis is framed within a history of confessionalism (*ta'ifiyya*) and its impact in the post-1990 context.

In conclusion to this section, I detail the structure of my experimental research. This paper includes three main chapters, without the present theoretical and methodological one. Chapter II, *A Tale of Beirut: Between a Safe Haven and a Battleground,* provides the historical background for the chosen case study: Beirut, the capital of Lebanon. It offers insights into the confessional system of Lebanon, into the 1975-1990 Civil War and its aftermath. The same chapter sketches the profiles of the four denominations under study. These sketches are meant to briefly inform the reader on the identities of the four chosen religious communities from Lebanon. Chapter III, *Bukhūr and the Official Sacred Smellscapes of Beirut* is an empirical chapter that develops on official religious narratives and practices where fragrant substances are employed. In the case of the three Christian denominations, the analytical focus is on the liturgy and the Church as a physical space and as a community of believers. For Sunni Muslims, I focus on the mosque, the daily obligatory prayer (salat) and the rituals of purification ascribed to it.

Chapter IV, *Bukhūr and the Everyday Smellscapes of Beirut,* is another empirical section where attention shifts from the authorized smellscape of a church or a mosque to the urban smellscapes of Beirut. Here I dive into the olfactory culture of this polis and research the religious, cultural and social narratives engendered by it. The same chapter deals also with the olfactory in the domestic space, where I focus on the private, individual usage of

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bukhūr. The concluding chapter, *Reflections on the Study of the (Sacred) Olfactory,* is complemented by *Appendices*, where I attach a series of informative materials and photos related to my field research in Beirut.

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Chapter II. A Tale of Beirut: Between a Safe Haven and a Battleground.

Following the San Remo Conference (April 19-26, 1920) which concluded World War I, the State of Greater Lebanon rose from the ashes of the crumbled Ottoman Empire. It rose under the mandate of France, entrusted with ushering the transition of the newly formed entity towards a fully-fledged republic. In 1926, Greater Lebanon became a republic with a constitution of its own, yet still under the French mandate. It was in 1943 that it broke loose from what came to be perceived as the French yoke and became a sovereign state.[52]

A recurrent characteristic in the history of Lebanon as a modern state has been the heterogeneous society segmented along confessional, political, ethnic or social lines. Markers of identification such as kin, religion, village, social class or gender have grounded the Lebanese in a web of relations, customs, rules and rituals.[53] From these markers, confessional affiliation has been an inherent "ingredient" in the Lebanese socio-cultural environment and in its governing political structures.[54]

The aim of this chapter is to present the historical background that shaped and was shaped by the intra- and inter- confessional interactions in the state of Lebanon. It focuses mainly on the Civil War of 1975-1990 and its aftermath, researching into the confessional narratives entailed by the war and their impetus after 1990, in Beirut. I further complement this historical inquiry by sketching the profiles of the four religious denominations that make the focus of this thesis: Maronite, Rum (Greek) Orthodox, Reformed Protestant and Sunni Muslim. I thus intend to provide the necessary information for the reader to smoothly navigate through the two empirical chapters of this research.

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[52] Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions. The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co. LTD, 2002), 19-37; For a map with the present borders of Lebanon, see *Appendices*, no. 2.
[53] Kassir, *Beirut,* 216-234.
[54] Latif Abul-Husn, *The Lebanese Conflict, Looking Inward* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 29-51.

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II.1. Confessionalism (*ta'ifiyya*) and the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990).

The social fabric of present-day Lebanon is characterized by a confessional diversity whose historical unfolding engendered both stability and instability. Today, this republic on the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea is home to a large variety of religious communities, out of which only eighteen are officially recognized.[55] Their interaction, either harmonious or confrontational, either across or along confessional lines, has been fostered by both sectarian and ecumenical lines of political discourse.[56] The National Pact (*al-Mithāq al-Waṭanī*)[57]*,* the brittle verbal agreement that stood at the foundation of the Lebanese state, aimed at "curing sectarianism and halting its evils".[58] A solution to this "curing" has been confessionalism (*ta'ifiyya*), the core of Lebanese governmentality up to the present.

Initially stipulated in the 1926 Constitution, this core principle entails that legislative, administrative, and judiciary posts are proportionally assigned according to the rule of confessional representation. For instance, the highest official state powers are divided among the three main confessions as registered in the last 1932 Census. Accordingly, the President has to be a Maronite, the Prime Minister has to be a Sunni and the President of the Parliament has to be a Shiʿi.[59] Yet, this sharing of power on a confessional basis resulted in both coexistence and conflict, in a Lebanon characterized by both religious harmony and rivalry. Lebanon's confessional diversity made it the so-called

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[55] United States Department of State, "2013 Report," http://www.refworld.org/docid/53d90755d.html.
[56] Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions,* 216-234.
[57] The National Pact was a gentlemen's agreement concluded at the time of Lebanon's independence from France. It consecrated the confessional formula stipulating that legislative, administrative, and judiciary posts were distributed according to a ratio of 6:5 of Christians to Muslim. For further details, see Farid al-Khazen "The Communal Pact of National Identities. The Making and Politics of the 1943 National Pact," *Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies* (1991), accessed April 21, 2014, http://lebanesestudies.com/portfolio-item/the-communal-pact-of-national-identities-the-making-and-politics-of-the-1943-national-pact/.
[58] Quotations from the 1943 ministerial statement of the Sunni Prime Minister Riyad al-Sulh. See Daniel Corstange, "Religion, Pluralism, and Iconography in the Public Sphere: Theory and Evidence from Lebanon," *World Politics*, 64 (2012): 11.
[59] Kassir, *Beirut,* 444.

"Switzerland of the Levant"[60], a space of prosperity and a safe haven for liberal economy, business and culture. Conversely, when coupled with poverty and social injustice, the same diversity transformed this country into a battlefield.

One such episode was the Civil War of 1975-1990, ignited by a complex of economic inequalities, domestic tensions over political power sharing, and exploitation of confessional differences. A combination of *laissez faire* economic policies and rapid urbanization led to deep social and economic disparities between the center and the periphery.[61] To these disparities was added an increasing demand for an equitable power-sharing system from the side of the Muslim community. Its representatives argued that the 6:5 ratio of Christians to Muslims established through the National Pact no longer reflected the changing social reality, where Muslims were steadily becoming a majority.[62] These domestic dissatisfactions, coupled with international tensions engendered by Palestine, Israel and Syria, led to Lebanon's gradual descend into civil war, in the spring of 1975.[63]

The confessional balance and the integrative potential ensured by the National Pact proved too brittle in the face of a civil war that gradually strengthened confessional loyalties and engendered sectarian cleavages. This identification along confessional lines was complemented by a "territorialization of space" as the armed conflict *within* Lebanon transformed into a conflict *for* its territory.[64] This transformation was visible in the case of the Lebanese capital, Beirut. The urban geography of this polis was greatly reshuffled. Neighborhoods were transformed into battlegrounds for proxy conflicts, streets were militarized, barriers and checkpoints were set and access was given based on criteria such as

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[60] Kassir, *Beirut,* 28 ; main source: Alphonse de Lamartine, *Souvenirs, Impressions, Pensées et Paysages, Pendant un Voyage en Orient* (1832-1833) (Paris: C. Gosselin, 1835).
[61] Traboulsi, *A History,* 156-187.
[62] Faten Ghosn and Amal Khoury, "Lebanon after the Civil War: Peace or the Illusion of Peace?" *Middle East Journal*, 65: 3 (2011): 382-383.
[63] Kassir, *Beirut,* 511-520.
[64] Peleikis, "Shifting Identities," 428.

religious or political affiliation. Gradually, the defense of the territory equated with the defense of one's confessional identity,[65] a process defined as sectarian territorialization.[66]

The most prominent territorial division was across the Green Line, a mark stretching from the old city southwards, along the Damascus Road. Henceforth, this street separated what were to become the confessionally-divided East and West Beirut.[67] On the one side, East Beirut was constructed as a predominantly Christian area and became a mini-republic for the Christian forces. On the other side, West Beirut became a primarily, but not exclusively, Muslim-inhabited region and it was called "the city of fortitude" or the "the patriotic area".[68] For confessional homogeneity to be achieved on each side of the Line, massive dislocations were carried out within the first two years of the civil war. If before the war Christians registered 35% in West Beirut, this number decreased up to 5% after the war. This decrease applied to East Beirut too, where the 8 % of registered Muslims was reduced to 1%.[69]

These demographic shifts came along with a process of reintegration in the new, confessional exclusive urban communities. To assure homogeneity, shops, houses and religious spaces representative for the confessional "other" were destroyed during the war. Instead, new social and communal networks were constructed in the new areas inhabited by "spiritual families".[70] These enclaves became self-sufficient too by providing social, cultural, economic or religious facilities within their borders. For safety reasons and even

[65] Yet, confessional affiliation was not the only communal loyalty enhanced during the war. In the face of a crumbling state that failed to assure protection, Lebanese turned towards their families, their friends or even the militias for protection. For a more in-depth analysis, see Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon. A History of the Internationalization of Communal Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press: 2002), 232-272.
[66] Nasser Yasin, "Violent Urbanization and Homogenization of Space and Place: Reconstructing the Story of Sectarian Violence in Beirut," in *Urbanization and Development: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Jo Beall, Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis, and Ravi Kanbur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 214-215.
[67] For a map marking the Green Line, see *Appendices*, no. 3.
[68] Sara Fregonese, "Between a Refuge and a Battleground: Beirut's Discrepant Cosmopolitanisms," *The Geographical Review* 102 (2012): 325-326.
[69] Yasin, "Violent Urbanization and Homogenization," 2.
[70] Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions,* 217.

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commodity, people gradually lost the incentive to cross the militarized borders of these urban districts. "A substantial number of Lebanese were living, working, shopping, and meeting their recreational, cultural medical and educational needs within constricted communal circles."[71] In other words, material, highly militarized barriers engendered social, cultural and psychological walls.

After fifteen years of violence and failed attempts of negotiation and reconciliation, the end of the civil war was sealed through the 1990 Taif Agreement. The conclusion of this agreement reasserted the confessional formula, but accommodated it to the present Muslim majority. As a consequence, the Maronite President lost a series of his executive prerogatives in favor of the Sunni Prime Minister and his Cabinet and the Shiʿi Speaker of the Parliament.[72]

Nevertheless, the Taif Agreement was a Janus-faced concord. While it provided the basis for a ceasefire, it also emphasized difference rather than national solidarity and collective consciousness. For example, the above-mentioned shift of prerogatives was described as a destabilizing factor by the Christian that I interviewed. Their dissatisfaction with this change was wrapped in a discourse on the socio-economic differences between the poor Muslims and the rich Christians. In this discursive frame, the improved educational and financial status of the Lebanese Muslims, particularly Sunni, stimulated their interest in political representation and governmental positions. In turn, this has contributed to a constantly present instability of the confessional form of government.[73]

These confessionally defined identities and spaces linger on in the post-war context. For instance, the sectarian territorialization enacted during the war still casts shadows on the urban topography of Beirut. The fifteen-year violent conflict, the population

[71] Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, 266.
[72] Traboulsi, *A History,* 240-246.
[73] The association between confession, education and social status is further developed in Chapter IV, subchapter 2, "The 'Odorous Others' – Smells as Markers of Identification."

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displacements aiming at confessional homogenization, and the foreign invasions impacted on the confessional distribution within the city.[74] Many neighborhoods remain homogeneous, standing as vestiges of what used to be East and West Beirut.[75] For example, Achrafieh, Rmeil or Saifi are districts in the Eastern part of Beirut and are mostly inhabited by Christians. Conversely, Bachura, Zarif or Zuqaq al-Blat are neighborhoods in the Western side of the city, where large numbers of Sunni and Shiʿa are registered. [76]

The confessional branding of these neighborhoods is engendered by the high numbers of inhabitants sharing the same religion and by their places of worship, religious rituals and displayed symbols (e.g. statues, icons and posters of saints or religious heroes).[77] Yet, these representations of the sacred cannot be researched independently from their relation with non-religious symbols, from their intertwinement in social life, and their opposition or support for political structures.[78] In this sense, the confessional identity of a district can be anchored in posters of religious figures, mosques or churches, but also in street names, school or even medical services. These confessional neighborhood profiles and the narratives they stimulate were the focus of my urban-mapping in modern-day Beirut, being further developed in Chapter IV, *Bukhūr and the Everyday Smellscapes of Beirut.*

The history of confessionalism in the state of Lebanon is a multilayered topic of research, whose intricacies do not make the focus of this research. However, a general perspective on the particularities of this state's founding principle is necessary for

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[74] For a more in-depth analysis of the confessional based migration in Beirut, see Michael M. Davie, "Le Cloisonnement Confessionnel d'une Ville: Le Modele Beyrouthin," *Mape Monde,* 4 (1991): 12-30.
[75] Abul-Husn, *The Lebanese Conflict,* 16.
[76] Due to the confessional based system of voting, an analysis of the Lebanese electoral districts provides valuable insights into the confessional distribution in Beirut. For a detailed map of this distribution in Lebanon, see International Foundation of Electoral System, "Elections in Lebanon. Overview of the Current 26 Electoral Districts" (2011), accessed May 15, 2015, http://www.ifes.org.; For a confessional map, see *Appendices,* no. 2.
[77] Paul O'Donnell, "'Place' as the Locus of 'Memory' Conserving the Cultural Patrimony of the Church," *The Australasian Catholic Record*, 86:4 (2009): 427.
[78] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion. Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 53-54.

understanding the importance of religious communal affiliation in present-day Beirut. Confessionalism has engendered toleration, inclusion and recognition, as well as differentiation, exclusion and indifference.[79] This was not only at the level of socio-political discourse, but also at the grassroots of Lebanese society. Beirut is a relevant example for the multi-layered influence of this principle, acting as both a safe have and a battleground for the many religious denominations that call it "home". Here I focused mainly on its image as a "battleground". For reasons of argumentation, I deal at length with its "safe haven" counterpart in subchapter IV.1, "The Olfactory Aesthetics of an Arab Metropolis.' There it becomes relevant to grasping the rich sensorial culture of the streets of present-day Beirut.

II.2. Sketches of Four Communities: Maronites, Rum (Greek) Orthodox, Eastern Protestants and Sunni Muslims.

The Maronites.

The midnight silence surrounding Place de L'Etoile in Downtown Beirut was broken by the bells of the recently constructed Maronite campanile. The rhythmic crystalline sound was calling the believers for the midnight Christmas mass. In front of the church, security guards and military trucks mingled with press agents and camera lights. Together with the Maronite religious community, they were waiting for the Bishop to start the celebration of the liturgy, in the Saint George Maronite Cathedral. Government officials, fashionably dressed young people, pious middle-aged women and an impressive number of priests came together to express a faith grounded in centuries of religious practice.[80]

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[79] For a more in-depth analysis of the effects of communal affiliation in post-1990 Lebanon, see Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*.
[80] For photos of the Cathedral, see *Appendices*, no. 4.

The Maronites recognize the 5th century Syrian Saint Marun as spiritual founder, hence the name. Yet, the roots of this community are shrouded in mystery, making the origins of this Catholic Eastern rite a subject of constant scholarly debate.[81] Allegedly, they are the descendants of a monothelite[82] Christian community of Syrian origin, emerging in the 6th century. According to the Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi, the Maronites are a splinter group from the Christian Arab tribes that migrated from Yemen to Syria. Here they were persecuted and pushed towards Mount Lebanon by the Byzantines, around the years 900 – 1000.[83] Conversely, the Maronite historical records starting with the 15th century do not acknowledge their initial heretical status as Monothelites, arguing that their community found refuge in Mount Lebanon from Muslim rather than Byzantine persecution.[84] This aspect holds true starting with the 16th century, which marked the beginning of the Ottoman authority in the Arab world. Then, Mount Lebanon became a Maronite stronghold against the Islamic oppressive policies on the local Christian communities.[85]

By the 12th century, the Maronite community recognized the authority and supremacy of Rome and, as a sign of allegiance, aided in the 1099 Crusade to conquer Jerusalem and Antioch. This alliance bore fruit in the 16th century (1510), when Pope Leo X recognized them as a historical Church of the Eastern rite. In its newly acquired status as a True Church among Arab pagans and schismatics, the Maronite community was symbolically described as “a rose among thorns”.[86] At present, the Maronite Church is in full communion with Rome, but has kept its Patriarchate institution established in the 11th

[81] Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, 87-107.
[82] The Monothelites recognized two Natures (divine and human) in Jesus, yet One Energy and One Will. The Monothelite doctrine was declared a heresy in the 7th century, during the 6th Ecumenical Council. Source: Ibid. p. 73.
[83] Allegedly, the Maronites were perceived as a potential danger by the Byzantines because of their tentative connection with Rome and because of their monothelite beliefs. Source: Tim Llewellyn, *Spirit of the Phoenix. Lebanon and the Story of Beirut* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2010), 31-34.
[84] Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, 72-107.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

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century. The "Patriarch of Antioch and All the East" is elected by the Synod of Maronite bishops, yet his authority applies only across Lebanon, Cyprus and other small regions in the Middle East.[87] Their liturgical tradition has also a mixed character. The Maronites abide by an Eastern Syriac type of liturgy (e.g. Saint James) which is, nonetheless, visibly adapted to the Latin rite. The official language used to be Syriac, but it is presently replaced by Arabic for the benefit of the predominantly Arab-speaking congregations.[88] For instance, the reading of the Gospel during the Christmas mass in the Saint George Maronite Cathedral was performed in Syriac, by an honorific member of the religious community.

Last but not least, another fruitful alliance that the Maronites have cultivated across their history is with France. Their diplomatic relations stretch as far as the 17th century, when prestigious Maronite families were entrusted with naming consuls in Beirut on behalf of France.[89] In this way, the Maronites developed sturdy relations and acquired protections from the West, while being under the Islamic rule of the Ottoman Empire.[90] This alliance blossomed after the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire. As the State of Greater Lebanon took shape under the French mandate, the European power actively favored the Christian confessions.[91] Taking advantage of the favorable context, the Maronites tried and succeeded in creating an institutional shield for their status as a Christian minority in an Islamic milieu. The apex of their communal diplomacy was reached in 1943, when the National Pact stipulated that the President of the sovereign Lebanese state must be a Maronite. This

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[87] Fiona McCallum, "The Maronites in Lebanon. A Historical and Political Perspective," in *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*, eds. Anthony O'Mahony and Emma Loosely (New York: Routledge, 2010), 25-40.
[88] A remnant of Syriac is still preserved in the most solemn portions of the service. For further details, see Sebastian Brock, "The Syrian Orthodox Church in the modern Middle East," in O'Mahony and Loosely, *Eastern Christianity,* 13-15.
[89] McCallum, "The Maronites in Lebanon," 25-40.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Abul-Husn, *The Lebanese Conflict,* 22.

principle has lived up to the present, the highest position in the state apparatus being legally designated to a member of the largest Christian community in Lebanon.[92]

The Rum (Greek) Orthodox.

It is the morning of December 25 and the Greek Orthodox parish in Ras Beirut is celebrating Christmas, in the Saint Mary's Orthodox Church of Dormition (*Sayyidat al-Niya*). A church hidden in the shadow of the *très chic* Hamra neighborhood makes its presence felt through the fragrant smell of bukhūr pervading its courtyard.[93]

Saint Mary's is the parish church of the Greek Orthodox community in Ras Beirut. It is located next to Saint Mary's Orthodox College, a school that assures education in English to pupils of all confessions. Both are incorporated into one of the eleven parishes that constitute the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Beirut. In its turn, the Archdiocese submits to the authority and tutelage of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. "The Antiochian Orthodox Church is best described as being the Arab branch of Orthodox Christianity."[94] While it abides by the same liturgical and doctrinal teachings as the Greek Orthodox Church, it has historical and cultural particularities engendered by its evolution in the Middle East and its allegiance to the Sea of Antioch.[95]

As a historical particularity, the Greek Orthodox community in the Middle East traces its roots back to the Melchites. They were a Christian Arab group of Syrian origin, which followed the Byzantine rite and eventually split in two branches: the Greek Orthodox

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[92] According to a 2011 demographic research conducted by Statistics Lebanon Ltd, a prominent pooling and research company based in Beirut, Maronites represent approximately 21% of the population of Lebanon. Source: United States Department of State, "2011 Report on International Religious Freedom – Lebanon" (2012), accessed May 15, 2015, http://www.refworld.org/docid/502105aac.html.

[93] For a photo of the church, see *Appendices,* no. 5.

[94] Nadine Nader and Mathew Stiffer, "Maronite Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Sunni Muslims from the Arab Region: Between Empire, Racialization and Assimilation," in *MisReading America: Scriptures and Difference,* eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Melissa Renee Reid (New York: Oxford University Press: 2013), 217.

[95] Ibid., 217-218.

and the Greek Catholics.[96] Their presence in Syria is accounted for through the same *topos* of migration as in the Maronite case. The memory of a 6th century exodus of the Arab Christian tribes from Yemen to Syria constitutes a lingering narrative in the collective imagination of the Greek Orthodox in Lebanon.[97]

A linguistic expression of these Arabic particularities is the alternative name of this religious denomination in the Middle East: Rum Orthodox. This appellative has its origins in the Arabic language, where the term *Rūm* was used to refer to Byzantium, which was perceived as the New Rome. For instance, *Rūm* appears in the Qur'an[98], where it refers to Eastern Romans, alias the Byzantine Christians.[99] This appellative lives up to this day. In their attempt to emphasize the Arab specificities of their religious identity, respondents were very keen on identifying themselves as Rum rather than Greek Orthodox. In tune with this tendency, I refer to the believers as Rum Orthodox, while keeping the term "Greek" in the official names of the churches (e.g. Saint George Greek Orthodox Cathedral).

Last but not least, the Rum Orthodox community in present-day Lebanon represents close to 8% percent of the Lebanese population.[100] This estimation ranks them as fourth religious community after Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims, and the Maronites. Most of the Lebanese affiliated with this confession inhabit coastal urban centers such as Kura, Beirut or Tripoli.[101] In the case of Beirut, neighborhoods such as Achrafieh, Mansurieh or Burj Hammud register high numbers of inhabitants affiliated to this religious denomination.

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[96] Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions,* 42.
[97] Maria B. Abunnasr, "The Making of Ras Beirut: A Landscape of Memory for Narratives of Exceptionalism, 1870-1975," (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, 2013), 199.
[98] See Qur'an 30 (*Sūrat al-Rūm*): 1-5 [translation in English by ʿAbdullah Yusuf ʿAli].
[99] Nadia el-Cheikh and C. E. Bosworth, "Rūm," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. P. Bearman et al., *Brill Online*, accessed June 1, 2015, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/rum-COM_0939?s.num=0&s.q=Rum
[100] United States Department of State, "2011 Report on International Religious Freedom," http://www.refworld.org/docid/502105aac.html.
[101] International Foundation of Electoral System, "Elections in Lebanon, "Overview of the Current 26 Electoral Districts," 2011, accessed May 15, 2015, http://www.ifes.org.

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The Protestants of the East.

The history of the Arab Protestant community in Beirut goes back to the 19th century American missionary activities in the Ottoman Empire. In 1820, the American Board of Commissionaires for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) announced their project of establishing a Protestant post in the ancient land of Israel. Their missiology objective in the Holy Land was initially focused on Jerusalem and Palestine.[102] Yet, their exploratory incursions in Jerusalem were met with strong opposition from both the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and the ruling Ottoman authorities. In the face of such difficulties, they directed their attention to Mount Lebanon, where they were also met with firm resistance by the Maronites and the Jesuits.[103]

This strong opposition from the other Churches was no surprise since their communities of believers were the chief target of the Protestant proselytizing activities. The attempt to convert Muslims could have led to death penalty under Ottoman ruling, thus the missionaries turned their attention towards reviving the belief and the practice of those "who were Christians only in name".[104] As a result, most of the Arabs who converted to Protestantism were either Greek Orthodox or, to a lesser extent, Maronites and Greek Catholics.[105]

Starting with the 1840s, the Protestants found a fertile environment for their mission in the port city of Beirut, where they enjoyed the protection of the British Consulate. By 1848, they had established the first Protestant Church in the Ottoman Empire and had been

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[102] Habib Badr, "American Protestant Missionary Beginnings in Beirut and Istanbul: Policy, Politics, Practice and Response," in *New Faith in Ancient Lands- Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,* ed. Hellen L. Murre-van Den Berg (Leiden: Brill, Hotei Publishing, 2006), 212-213.
[103] Kassir, *Beirut*, 180-184.
[104] Idem, 213.
[105] Abunnasr, "The Making of Ras Beirut," 199.

running twelve schools.[106] The focus on education was a core principle of their missionary activity, the schools being both places of learning and sites of conversion. This attention on education increased during the 1860s, when the Protestants engaged intensively in opening and improving schools around Beirut. The apex of their educational campaign was in 1866, when the Syrian Protestant College was establish, an institution that was later renamed the American University of Beirut.[107]

However, the success of these educational projects did not necessarily go hand in hand with the development of a cohesive Protestant congregation. As the Church was enlarging its community with native Arab converts, dissatisfaction arouse from within its midst. Native Protestants gradually voiced their discontent with the fact that most of the church positions were held by their American co-religionists. Yet, it took more than twenty years for their voices to be heard as it was only in 1890 that the first native Syrian pastor was elected.[108]

Today, the Arab Protestants in Beirut represent a minority community that is divided across many denominations and religious groups. In Lebanon, three of the main four Protestant branches are present: the Anglicans, the Reformed and the Free Churches. The Free Churches include congregations of Baptists, Pentecostals or Nazarenes.[109] These diverse Protestant groups find unity in the administrative headquarters of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut. Together, they function under the title of the National Evangelical Union of Lebanon. Most of the Beirutis affiliated to one of these Protestant branches inhabit the area of Ras Beirut. Their presence here can be linked to an early 20th

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[106] Badr, "American Protestant Missionary Beginnings in Beirut," 12.
[107] Traboulsi, *A History,* 60-63.
[108] Deanna Ferree Womack, "Syrian Protestants & the Case of the Beirut Church: Re-imagining the American Missionary Encounter in Ottoman Syria," *Syrian Studies Association Bulletin,* 19:1 (2014), accessed May 1, 2015, https://ojcs.siue.edu/ojs/index.php/ssa/article/view/3021/980.
[109] Information acquired during my interview with Reverend Ramez from the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, December, 28, 2014.

century wave of converted Arabs who moved to Ras Beirut, where they came to be known as "the Protestants of Ras Beirut".[110]

The Sunni Muslims.

Today, Sunni Muslims are the majoritarian Islamic denomination in Lebanon, representing approximately 27% of the population.[111] The development of this community found a fertile ground during the Ottoman Empire, when Sunni Islam was the official state religion. Yet, once with the collapse of the Empire, they lost their vantage point as the dominant confession. Starting with the 1943 National Pact, the Sunnis have been junior partners in the governing system of the Lebanese state as the Prime-Minister is elected from among the members of this confession. Yet, aside the history of their involvement in power structures, what is the religious profile of the Sunnis?

The appellative Sunni stands for the Arabic phrase *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jama'a*, which designates the people of the prophetic tradition and the community of believers.[112] Two principles central to this branch of Islamic tradition are reflected in this Arabic phrase. Firstly, Sunnis are members of a universal community of believers called *umma*.[113] Secondly, Sunni Islam has a scriptural character, being grounded in the holy book of Qur'an as its "constitution". The authority of the divine message revealed to Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel is complemented by a tradition grounded in hadith, Qur'anic commentaries, the Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the Islamic law of shariʿa.

Among these scriptural sources, hadith and *fiqh* will recurrently be brought forth in this research to reflect the authority they have on the performative aspect of Sunni Islam.

[110] Abunnasr, "The Making of Ras Beirut," 199.
[111] United States Department of State, "2011 Report on International Religious Freedom," http://www.refworld.org/docid/502105aac.html.
[112] "Introduction," *Encyclopedia of Islam,* ed. Juan E. Campo (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), XXV.
[113] Ibidem.

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Hadith collections, i.e. Muslim Tradition, incorporate narrations on the alleged teachings, deeds and silent approvals of the Prophet. These stories come together to reflect the sunna, the “well-trodden path” established by Muhammad through his life, exemplary character and behavior. As such, this corpus of teachings has a practical character, being a source of authority in everyday moral guidance, religious belief and practice.[114] *Fiqh* refers to Islamic jurisprudence and defines the knowledge and the comprehension of the Islamic law by scholars possessing a high religious expertise.[115] Another scholar whose authority is sought for in religious and legal matter is the shaykh. In Sunni Islam, the term refers to a leader of high moral standing, who has a great knowledge of shariʿa. In the case of the Lebanese justice system, the shaykh can also act as a court magistrate and deal with the judicial matters that fall under the confessional legal jurisdictions (e.g. marriage, inheritance or divorce).[116]

These authoritative sources and scholars shape the beliefs and practices of Sunni Muslims. One such regulated practice that incorporates an olfactory aspect in its performance is the salat. This is the canonical Muslim worship (*ʿibadāh*) and constitutes one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam (*arkān al-Islām*) or pillars of faith (*arkān al-dīn*).[117] Its foundational authority lays in the Qur’an, but it is the hadith that provides elaborations on the specificities of this ritual and the Islamic legal tradition that canonized it.[118]

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[114] Th. W. Juynboll, "ḥadīth."[hadith] *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed., eds., M. Th. Houtsma et. al, *Brill Online*, accessed April 1, 2015, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-1/hadith SIM_2580?s.num=1&s.q=%E1%B8%A4ad%C4%ABth+

[115] “fiqh,” *Encyclopedia of Islam,* 238-240.

[116] In Lebanon, matters of commercial, criminal or civil nature fall under the jurisdiction of a civil court, while personal issues such as marriage, inheritance or divorce fall under confessional legal jurisdiction. These matters are handled by the religious courts of the eighteen officially recognized religious denominations. Source: Abul-Husn, *The Lebanese Conflict,* 30.

[117] The five fundamental pillars of Islam are: salat, zakat, *shahāda*, hajj, *ṣawm*. For an elaboration on each, see “Pillars of Islam,” *Oxford Islamic Studies Online,* accessed May 15, 2015. http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1859?

[118] Mun’im Sirry, A. Rashied Omar, “Muslim Prayer and Public Spheres: An Interpretation of the Qur’anic Verse 29:45,” *A Journal of Bible and Theology*, 68:1 (2014), 39–53

Salat rhythmically punctuates the life of a Sunni as it should be performed five times a day, at precise hours. In this act of worship, believers engage in a series of prescribed movements and sayings, always facing the holy city of Mecca and the holy Kaʿba.[119] These prayers are not confined to a specific place and are generally performed individually. One exception is the congregational Friday prayer (*ṣalāt al-jum`a*). Then the community of believers comes together in a mosque and performs the ritual prayer under the guidance and leadership of an imam. The responsibilities of the imam extend beyond his role as a leader of the communal prayer. He also delivers the sermon from the pulpit after the Friday prayer and acts as a source of guidance and authority for local Muslim communities.[120] Nevertheless, the concept of worship in Islam is a comprehensive one and regulates all levels of human life. As such, the jurisdiction of worship extends beyond the five pillars of Islam or the salat, as every virtuous action done with the intent of praising God becomes an act of worship. In turn, this creates a fusion between the public and the private, the religious and the ordinary, the social and the individual. This encompassing aspect of prayer in Islam will be dealt with in more depth in Chapter III, subchapter 3, "The Scented Social Code of Sunni Muslims in Beirut."

To sum up this chapter, *ta'ifiyya* played a multilayered and complex role in the Lebanese recent history and socio-political culture. This principle stood at the foundation of a sovereign state, only to later contribute to its plunging into a civil war. It created a safe haven where multiple confessions could co-exist, but also strengthened the cleavages stimulated by differences in religious beliefs. Beirut reflects the same synthesis of contraries. It was a safe haven and a fertile environment for the development of a rich and diverse culture. Conversely, it was a battleground where demographics, urban geographies

[119] "Pillars of Islam," http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1859?
[120] "imam," *Encyclopedia of Islam,* 347-348.

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and mentalities were violently reshuffled during the Civil War of 1975-1990. Today, the concrete physical and military barriers have fallen.[121] If a district is confessionally homogenous, it does not necessarily mean that it is impermeable for members of the other religious affiliations. Yet, this might not be the case with the psychological and mental barriers. For the Beirutis, the communal attachment is still a powerful marker of identification and differentiation from the confessional "others". It is they and their affiliation to one of the religious denominations sketched above that make the focus of the following two empirical chapters.

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[121] However, these barriers are on the brink to be re-erected, in response to current wars in neighboring Syria.

Chapter III: Bukhūr and the Official Sacred Smellscapes of Beirut.

> […] But now, though we fill it [church] with incense that can be perceived by the senses, yet [we] do not take much trouble to purge out the uncleanliness of the mind, and drive it away. Where then is the use of it?[122]

> ʿAʾisha said, "Perfume the Kaʿba, because this is a part of purifying it." Ibn Az-Zubair […] used to burn one pound of incense in the Kaʿba daily, but on Friday, he burnt two pounds of incense.[123]

The profile of a religious community is inscribed in prayer books and scriptures, but also incorporated through shared sensorial and affective forms engendered by material incentives such as icons, chants, fragrances, garments etc. These collective sensorial experiences are regularly enacted through authorized formal practices,[124] where networks of symbols and ceremonial objects are employed, recognized, and embodied by a community of believers. Two of these seasonal practices will be analyzed in this chapter: the Christian liturgy and the Muslim salat. Acknowledging the diversity of the three Christian denominations under study, I minimally define the liturgy as a collective and public ritual confined to a church and mediated by the representatives of particular Christian ecclesiastical hierarchies (priest, bishop, pastor etc.).[125]

The aim of this chapter is to look into the sacred smellscapes created during the official practices of the liturgy and salat, focusing on churches and mosques in Beirut. Here

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[122] E. G. Cuthbert Frederic Atchley, *A History of the Use of Incense in Divine Worship*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), 200; primary source: Philip Schaff, ed., *St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, in *Nicean and Post-Nicean Father of Christian Church*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1888), series, 1, vol. 10, *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, accessed May 15, 2015, http://www.ccel.org/

[123] Muhammad Sa'eed Dabas and M.S. Kayani, trans. Sayyid Sabiq's *Fiqh al-sunna*, (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust: 1991), vol. 5, chap. 13, accessed May 1, 2015, archive.org.

[124] Meyer, *Aesthetic Formation,* 6-7.

[125] Here I do not deal in depth with the theological specificities of the three liturgies, but rather focus on the experience of the community of believers and/or on the official positions offered by the priests whom I interviewed. For an in depth analysis of this topic, see Lawrence E. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University press, 1987), F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1896).

I explore how the authorized representations on bukhūr in the four religious denominations (Rum Orthodox, Maronite, Reformed Protestant, and Sunni Muslim) are ritually enacted and embodied by the community of practicing believers. In this sense, I intertwine the information acquired during my interviews and participatory observations in Beirut with insights into the theological doctrines on bukhūr, the specificities of devotion and the socio-historical development of the four religious denominations. When data allows, I cross the border of the sacred space of worship and look at the cultural specificities of the Eastern Mediterranean region and the history of Lebanon.

An element characteristic of both the Eastern Christian liturgies and the Muslim salat is their rich usage of bukhūr, a practice that is also expressive of the love for fragrant substances specific to the Eastern Mediterranean region. Aromatic substances have ranged among the most precious commodities from ancient times, this region being famous for its heavy involvement in incense trade.[126] Incense and perfumes have been extensively used in funerals, as luxury items, for purifying and cleaning the domestic space or for divine adoration. This rich history of the fragrant finds expression in the official worship practices of the religious denominations of present-day Beirut and in the way believers comprehend and embody these practices. In the following subchapters, I offer glimpses into the religious culture of this city by focusing on official religious rituals defined by a rich olfactory or by a lack of it.

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III.1. The Transfiguration of Bukhūr: Rum Orthodox and Maronite Rituals.

"[…] this is when I understood that the holy matters smell nice."[127]

"The natural one [bukhūr] smells horrible."…said the young, fidgeting vicar of the Saint George Maronite Cathedral. Nada, a practicing Rum Orthodox, evaluated bukhūr

[126] See Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade* (London: International Book Center, 1981).
[127] Interview with Nada, a Rum Orthodox and a University Professor, December 23, 2014.

according to its quality “As everything in nature, there is good and bad. If bukhūr gives a lot of smoke at the end, it has a bad fragrance…like if you are setting fire to a tree. If it does not [give a lot of smoke], it is good.”[128] Also, the Maronite Father Yusuf stated that smell and price are two of the most important factors when purchasing the substance for the Saint George Maronite Cathedral in Beirut.

Rum Orthodox and Maronite priests and practicing believers had no restraints in evaluating bukhūr economically or according to personal taste. However, these evaluations would only fit a particular context: outside the liturgical ritual enacted in a church. In the sacred smellscape constructed during the liturgy, bukhūr loses any trace of foul odor only to become the most beautiful fragrance in the world. In this subchapter, I analyze how the ordinary becomes extraordinary[129]; how bukhūr transforms from a substance evaluated according to personal likes and dislikes into an agent of transition from the profane to the sacred. I pay particular attention to how the theological principle on bukhūr as “the odor of Christ” is enacted during the liturgy and how the Maronites and the Rum Orthodox appropriate it and experience it.

In Eastern Christianity, the church is the *locus* of salvation and of encounter with the divine. In the words of the Early Church Father John Chrysostom “You have entered the Church, O Man; you have been held worthy of the company of Christ”.[130] At the same time, the liturgy is the most important communal expression of faith and religious identity.[131] On a Sunday morning, enter a Rum Orthodox or a Maronite church in Beirut and you will find yourself surrounded by pious believers engaging in liturgical rituals perfected by years of

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[128] Ibidem.
[129] Houtman and Meyer, *Things,* 3.
[130] M. F. Toal, trans. and ed., St. John Chrysostom’s’ *On the Respect Due to the Church of God and to the Sacred* Mysteries, in *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers* (Swedesboro NJ: Preservation Press, 1996), 137-145.
[131] See Vrasidas Karalis, “Greek Christinaity after 1453,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, ed. Ken Parry (United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 156-185; Peter Galadza, “Liturgy and Heaven in Eastern Rites,” *Antiphon* 10:3 (2006): 239-260.

tradition. These forms of collective worship are characterized by a *topos* where the divine revelation is mediated through ritualized gestures, prayers, chants, or ceremonial objects.[132] The material environment and the liturgical actions of the believers come together in a performative act that generates the encounter with the divine. This generation is also dependent on an intrinsically metaphorical character of the liturgy, where every element and action becomes an expression of theologically authorized symbols. In the frame of this liturgical aesthetics, the bells adorning the censers represent the voice of the apostles; the altar signifies the corners of the world and the censer is a sign of Virgin Mary.[133]

The element that makes the focus of this chapter is bukhūr, a fumigatory substance that was extensively used during the Maronite and Rum Orthodox liturgies that I attended in Beirut. The historical roots of this rich employment are quite obscure because of the scarcity of sources on the evolution of liturgical rituals in the East.[134] The sources that do exist have been successfully compiled and analyzed by scholars such as E. G. Cuthbert Frederic Atchley or Michael Pfeifer.[135] In his pioneering book *A History of the Use of Incense in Divine Worship*, Atchley historically traced the inclusion of incense in the Eastern and Western churches. He argued that the Eastern rites developed a richer usage of incense than the occidental ones and attached a more varied symbolistic to this fragrant practice. This diversity is characteristic for the Rum Orthodox and the Maronite liturgical traditions too. Here bukhūr may acquire a sacrificial, a festive or an honorific symbolism, depending on the moment of censing.

From this diverse pallet, I pinpoint to a representation common to both rites: bukhūr as a symbol for the sweet fragrance of Christ. As the odorized smoke fills the

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[132] "encens," *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne,* 10-11.
[133] This information was acquired during my interviews with ecclesiastical officials from Saint George Maronite Cathedral, Saint George Greek Orthodox Cathedral and its parish of Ras Beirut.
[134] "encens," *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne,* 10.
[135] See Atchley, *A History of the Use of Incense;* Michael Pfeifer, *Der Weihrauch. Geschichte, Bedeutung, Verwendung* (Pustet: Regensburg, 1997).

church, believers are converted by this sweet scent into a community that symbolizes the Church as a bride. This imagery fits a larger discourse characteristic to Eastern Christian theology, which was hardly influenced by the exhortations on individual human guilt of Saint Paul, Saint Augustine or Luther.[136] Instead, it developed within the paradigm of a morally perfect world and a divine potential of Man. It found authority in the writings of patristic Fathers such as Saint Athanasius, according to whom "the only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods."[137]

These theological specificities are embedded in the ritual language and actions of the Rum Orthodox and Maronite liturgies. During the Christmas church service of the Greek Orthodox parish of Ras Beirut, the censing of the attending believers was accompanied by a song in Arabic that could roughly be translated as "we were baptized in Christ so we can be dressed in Christ."[138] The midnight Christmas mass of the Saint George Maronite Cathedral started with a censing of the community, action that was justified by Father Yusuf as an act of veneration. "We incense them not for purification, but for veneration. It is an act of piety and veneration [...] through baptism; we are saints and not sinners."[139] The same church service continued with a censing prior to the main reading of the Gospel. As an explanation for this liturgical act, the vicar of the Cathedral stated that the Gospel, as the Word of God, has to be accompanied by bukhūr, as a symbol for the Odor of Christ.

By exposure to these repetitive liturgical structures, the Rum Orthodox and the Maronites appropriate and embody this theological discourse on bukhūr as the odor of Christ. One of these believers was Rawad, who entered the Saint Mary's Orthodox Church

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[136] Karalis, "Greek Christinaity after 1453," 170.
[137] Bindley, T. Herbert, trans., Saint Athanasius*' De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, (London: Religious Tract Society, 19--?), part I, chapt. 3, accessed May 1, 2015, archive.org.
[138] This verse can be referenced to Galatians 3:27: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." [King James Version], https://www.biblegateway.com/.
[139] Interview with Father Yusuf from Saint George Maronite Cathedral, December 25, 2014.

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of Dormition to celebrate Christmas, on the morning of December 25. As he walked towards the threshold of the church, his voice tone lowered and his footsteps became lighter. He sat in a middle-row bench, amid those who are his friends and "brothers in Christ". As the liturgy unfolded, Rawad's nostrils were constantly teased by the fragrance of bukhūr, stubbornly reminding him that a religious ceremony was unfolding. Discrete at times, this perfume of the church became poignant every time Father Nicola censed the altar, the icons or the community of believers. Immersed in the fragrant environment and through the veil of sweet-smelling smoke, Rawad observed the priest going in and out of the altar, then descending into the naos to cense "the bride of Christ". Those present bowed their heads or took photos with their cellphones as the authoritative figure of Father Nicola passed them by, his sturdy hand swinging the censer. When the priest reached the middle-row bench, Rawad's head bowed in respect and his eyes closed in reflection.

For Christians like Rawad, bukhūr becomes not only a symbol of Christ but a medium for sensing and making sense of the sacred. They experience the odor of Christ through a paradigm of absence and presence, where the divinely absent becomes present to perception through the fumigation of this solid substance. In this framework, its fragrant odor acquires temporal, spatial and emotive dimensions, which trigger specific affective and sensorial forms in the community of believers. Through the cyclical celebration of the liturgy, these intensities are collectively understood and embodied, leading to the creation of a community of believers as a "community of senses". In the following paragraphs, I further analyze the connection between these three dimensions (temporal, spatial and emotive) and the sensorial forms engendered in my respondents.

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The Rum Orthodox and the Maronites who devotedly attend the liturgies undergo an experience characterized by a spatial dimension.[140] Through the cyclical usage, the fragrance of bukhūr becomes branded to the church as a physical space and as an event - a ritualized network of relations, objects, events and gestures brought together in the liturgy. At the same time, bukhūr acts as a branding agent, a characteristic that was creatively described by one of the Maronite believers: "the bukhūr is, you know; smoke…so the smoke also gets stuck on the walls [of the church] and the clothing. If they [the believers] enter a space, they will smell like the space."[141] Thus, a sacred smellscape is created, which demarcates sacred islands from the mundane of everyday life.

The faithful perceive this non-visual scape as the manifestation of the sacred. Their perception is also enhanced by the rich quantities of burnt bukhūr that create a dense atmosphere in the church. Here the divinely absent becomes mysteriously present through the disembodied nature of the fragrant odor. This sacred smellscape is both visually and olfactively apprehended. "You see the thick atmosphere that veils the sacrosanct."[142] Yet, to see the scented smoke is not the same as to smell it. Odors are immersive and their apprehension invariably implies inhalation. The inhaled odor of bukhūr becomes intrinsic to the human body and the believers sensorially experience this thick atmosphere as a form of submersion into the sacred space. As the smell "penetrates […] in a gaseous form into their most sensory inner being,"[143] an intimate and familiar connection with the sacred is established. In recounting this olfactory involvement, the Rum Orthodox and the Maronites

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[140] For an in depth analysis of the role between olfaction and space, see Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies*; Douglas J. Porteous, *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).
[141] Fragment from a discussion with a Maronite who attended the midnight Christmas mass at the Saint George Maronite Cathedral in Beirut, on December 25, 2014.
[142] Interview with Nada, Rum Orthodox.
[143] George Simmel, "Sociology of the Senses," 119.

attending the Christmas liturgies used a multisensorial register such as “wrapping”, “enfolding” or “the touch of God”.

Furthermore, olfaction engenders a different temporal perception during the liturgical act. Outside the confinement of this communal worship, the smell of bukhūr acted retrospectively on the respondents and stimulated memories of a time and a space in the past.[144] Yet, such is not the case during the liturgy, where odor becomes a “travel agent” with an anticipatory character. The olfactory of the engaged individual stimulates a “memory of the future” by offering a glimpse into an ontologically different space that is to come in an eschatological time: Heaven. Yet, this anticipatory character of olfaction should be analyzed within the synesthetic experience of the liturgy, where the senses and the material environment come together to create a euphoric perception of the sacred. “So when I attended the liturgy…the Veneration of the Holy Cross….then you do not know if you are in Earth or in Heaven because of the rituals, the cloths, the gestures, the incense.”[145] Here the present community of believers is exposed to a dazzling multi-sensorial event: enveloped by soft candle light, amazed by clerical garments and ceremonial decorations, teased by scented smells, watched by omnipresent icons and enchanted by rhythmic tunes.

This synesthetic experience engenders a somatic reaction as the bodies of the believers engage in the prescribed liturgical choreography of movements and sayings. For example, the interaction between the bishop, the priests and the pious believers attending the Maronite Christmas mass unfolded according to unspoken rules. Each knew its part: when to speak, when to keep reverential silence, when to stand or when to kneel. In other words, in the framework of a liturgy as a social event that establishes relations between the

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[144] This retrospective character of olfaction is developed in Chapter IV, *Bukhūr and the Everyday Smellscapes of Beirut.*

[145] Interview with Nada, Rum Orthodox.

believers and the church environment, those present become grounded in a *here* and *now* that conveys a future *to come*.

Paradoxically, this glimpse into the "eternal to come" is the result of a tradition of authorized rituals, meanings and material "things". The prospective nature of bukhūr is legitimate only within an official discourse on the liturgy as a symbol of celestial life and within a ritual enacted by a priest in a church. Akin to these requirements, in both the Maronite and the Rum Orthodox rites, the incensing is done only by the person occupying the highest position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The interviews also revealed a connection between the sacred smellscape created during the liturgy and the spiritual experience of the body immersed in it. As believers inhale the vapors of bukhūr and their bodies engage in the prescribed choreography, they undergo a spiritual metamorphosis. "The experience of incense is like fire crackers, what you hope to achieve is the Fire ...that is what gives you warmth."[146] In other words, the evanescent physical smell of bukhūr has a vicarious character. It assures the transition towards an internal spiritual effect that, once achieved, authenticates the religious experience. Interestingly, attributes used to describe the symbol (bukhūr) and what it stands for (the divinely present) were used by believers to talk about their spiritual cleansing. For example, "a hot heart", "the Fire", "the warmth" were recurrent words in the descriptions of their experience of bukhūr during the liturgy.

Moreover, this internal spiritual transformation is made sense of through a homology between odors and morality. The fragranced smell of bukhūr becomes a symbol of and an incentive to moral rectitude.[147] During the liturgy, believers appropriate the theology on the odor of Christ by associating the smell of bukhūr with everything that is

[146] Interview with Father Alexios from Saint George Greek Orthodox Cathedral, December 24, 2014.
[147] For an analysis of the connection between the olfactory and morality, see Low, "Presenting the Self."

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(morally) good. As they inhale this scented vapor, they experience a metamorphosis of their bodies and minds, which acquire a predisposition for positive action and prayer.

> "Affected spiritually, yes…you know, […] I think this good smell symbolizes…everything good. So I think that everyone who smells this good, will feel that he has to do something good like the smell."[148]

Last but not least, I could also identify instances when respondents evaluated their experience of the liturgy through the politico-historical frame of the 1975-1990 civil war. They often recollected moments when their religious community would came together to celebrate the liturgy during the war. This action was understood as a revolt against the pollution, the vicissitudes and the interdictions of this armed conflict. Entering the space of the church washed away the pungent smell of fear and the memories of a day to day war that my interviewees did not identify with. The liturgy became a ritual of collective spiritual cleansing. In this frame, bukhūr became an olfactory marker for a place and a joyous social event in the background of painful wartime memories.[149] The smell of burning gunpowder was replaced by the perfume of incense. Interestingly, sound accompanied the olfactory as a sense stimulus associating the church with joyous moments during the civil war.

> "Once, our bishop went to the Western part of Beirut. Usually, when the bishop arrived in the church, they rang the bell. It did not happen this time and the bishop said "Why are you not ringing the bells?" "Ring the bells." Everybody started crying with emotion when the bells were tolled."[150]

The sacred smellscapes created during the liturgies emphasize both integrity and discontinuity. As each believer embodies the "particles of the odor", he/she experienced a communion with the other and with God. Incense symbolically unites in one smell

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[148] Interview with Rawad, a Rum Orthodox and a medical engineer, December 21, 2014

[149] Gerald C. Cupchik et al.,"Recognizing Odors Associated with Meaningful Places," *The American Journal of Psychology*, 123:3 (2010): 281.

[150] Interview with Father Alexios, Saint George Greek Orthodox Cathedral.

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individuals, saints and souls, transforming them into a congregation of worshippers.[151] This aspect was creatively stated by Nada, a University Professor and a Rum Orthodox who faithfully attends the liturgy: "When I smell bukhūr I feel like I am praying with the entire community of believers in Heaven."[152] Conversely, when asked about the differences between the Christian and the Muslim usage of bukhūr in Beirut, the Rum Orthodox and the Maronites brought forth the liturgical usage of this substance in opposition to the fragrant practices of the Muslims. For example, Nada emphasized that only the bukhūr produced in a monastery and employed in the "sophisticated" liturgical space of a church can be holy. In contrast, the one used by the Muslims "is not sacred, it is not religion because they do not have the ritual", its profane character being associated with the richness and the trade activities of the Arabs. In this sense, the appropriation of the liturgical ceremonial of bukhūr becomes a type of language[153] accentuating differentiation from the "other" Muslim practices.

In conclusion, the sacrosanct is to be cognitively apprehended and sensorially experienced in the Rum Orthodox and Maronite liturgical aesthetics. During the liturgy, believers appropriate the symbol of bukhūr as the odor of Christ by sensorially relying on the external material environment for a spiritual transformation. For them, bukhūr can be a symbol of the transcendent, a sacred medium through which the divine makes Itself present or a marker of confessional differentiation. Yet, this transfiguration of bukhūr becomes salient and engenders particular sensational forms only within the prescribed liturgical ritual and the sacred space of the church. Here the visible gives sway to the invisible, the sensorial attunes to the spiritual and the physical space transforms into a place inhabited by the sacred.

[151] Margaret E. Kenna, "Why Incense Smells Religious," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 15:1 (2005): 8.
[152] Interview with Nada, Rum Orthodox.
[153] Charles D. S. Dwight, "Man as a Ceremonialist," *Social Science,* 11:2 (1936): 128.

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III. 2. The Olfactory Exceptionalism of the Reformed Protestants in Beirut.

> But using bukhūr is a tradition and the habit should continue. It is better to continue like that so people would feel safe that they are doing their religious duties properly.[154]

The Arab Reformed Protestants in present-day Lebanon are a Christian minority among the Christian communities of the Middle East.[155] The history of this religious denomination stretches back to the 19th century American Presbyterian and Congregational missionary activity in the Middle East. In 1848, their missions to the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire materialized in the first native Protestant church in the empire.[156] This Church lives up to this day in Beirut under the name of The National Evangelical Church. The modest limestone building at the downhill of Zuqaq al-Blat is the headquarters for a group of nine Protestant parishes under the umbrella of the National Evangelical Union of Lebanon.[157]

The roots of their theological foundations, liturgical prescriptions and other religious practices stretch back to the iconic 16th century Protestant Reformation, which emerged in Germany and later develop in Switzerland, England and America. Among the multifarious Protestant denominations, this native Arab church in Beirut is affiliated to the Reformed branch, whose authority stem from the teachings of Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin.[158] The Reformed are characterized by their emphasis on the rational apprehension of the divine, where senses and emotions become obstacles to a proper Christian experience. These values take the form of a liturgy that minimizes as much as possible the sensorial incentive and an

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[154] Interview with Reverend Ramez, National Evangelical of Beirut.
[155] George Sabra, "The Present Situation of the Evangelical Churches in the Near East," *Theological Review*, *Theological Review* XXVI: 1(2005): 128.
[156] For further details see: Murre-van Den Berg, *New Faith in Ancient Lands,* 211 – 239 or Chapter II, subchapter 2, "The Protestants of the East."
[157] For a photo of the church, see *Appendices*, no. 6.
[158] Philip A. Mellor, "Embodiment, Emotion and Religious Experience: Religion, Culture and the Charismatic Body," in *The Sage Handbook on the Sociology of Religion*, eds. James A. Beckford and N.J. Demerath III (London: Sage Publication, 2007), 599.

architecture that eschews decorative representations.[159] In this case, it would seem difficult to talk about a sacred smellscape where a thick veil of bukhūr triggers a dazzling synesthetic experience, as in the Rum Orthodox and the Maronite cases.

However, the reduced presence of sensorial stimuli in the church and during the liturgy does not necessarily imply a lack of sensorial apprehension of the divine. As in the case of all other Arab Christian communities, this community is mostly formed of Arabic-speaking members. They are the natives of an Eastern Mediterranean culture that is famous for its love for the fragrant and its rich employment of scented essences. This cultural specificity proved a challenge from the very beginning for the American missionaries. For example, the 1833 letter of a preacher read "to adopt our spiritual religion, seems to them [the Arabs] like letting go of the substance, to embrace a shadow […]."[160] At the same time, these native Reformed Protestants are surrounded by a variety of other religious denominations that regularly use bukhūr in their practices of worship. They themselves might come from families with mixed confessional backgrounds, where incense is often used in different domestic religious rituals (e.g. prayer).[161] In this subchapter, I research into how the Reformed Protestants in Beirut "easternize" their historically rooted religious affiliation through their perception and usage of bukhūr and their liturgical practices.

In the fading sound of the midday call to prayer from Muhammad Al-Amin Mosque, I walked into a modestly furnished office, books pilling on shelves on the left-side wall. Next to this "office library", one large window looked out at the clock tower of the National Evangelical Church. Seated, a grey-haired pastor in his 50s welcomed me with a refrained, yet candid smile. Reverend Ramez was a tall, slim man, who imposed respect by his calm

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[159] Ibid.
[160] Badr, "American Protestant Missionary Beginnings in Beirut," 219.
[161] For example, one of my respondents grew up in a Catholic family; another came from a family background where his grandfather was an American missionary, his mother was an Evangelical and his father was a Rum Orthodox.

but firm way of talking. With the smell of Arabic coffee and the prospects of a successful interview, I started my conversation by asking about the status of bukhūr in the Protestant church that he is pastoring.

In a pedagogical and detached tone, he referred to the 16th century Protestant Reformation in order to present the historical and theological reasons for the lack of bukhūr in the Reformed liturgy. Yet, the strife against the machinations of the Catholic Church in the 16th century Europe seemed "far and strange" for him, as a native Arab Protestant. As a solution, he appropriated the history of the European Protestantism by framing his discourse in a Reformation analogy. The challenges and opportunities of the 16th century reformers in Europe became the trials and chances of the 19th century American missionaries in the Middle East. For him, a common characteristic to both sides of the analogy was the rigid, sometimes unfounded frame of "Us *versus* Them". *Us* stood for the Protestants and *Them* referred to the Catholic Church. In describing the attitude of the 19th century missionaries in the Middle East, Reverend Ramez mildly criticized their instinctive reaction towards "the Catholic looking-like" elements:

> So they rejected everything that looked Catholic to them…images, statues, prayers, incense, especially the adoration of Mary. I believe this was a reaction because they were opposed by the local churches. So first was the reaction, and after they found a theological meaning for it.[162]

He continued by arguing that the lack of bukhūr in the Middle Eastern Protestant churches is a consequence of the same type of reaction, one that might lack strong biblical arguments. "Now my evaluation to that is that there is no problem in using incense in the Church. It was only a reaction to the opposed one. Whatever you see at your competitors…not to say enemies…you reject. So you shape your identity, which is different

[162] Interview with Reverend Ramez, National Evangelical Church.

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from the others."[163] The "competitors" in the case of the Protestant missions of the 19th century in Mount Lebanon and the surroundings were mostly the Maronite and the Rum Orthodox Churches.[164] It was they who took the place of the Catholic Church as a paragon of institutionalized religion, once in which priests and ordinary believers had lost sight of the essential: the sole authority of the Scriptures. According to Reverend Ramez, a remnant of this reaction is the total absence of bukhūr in the official religious rituals of the Reformed Church of Beirut. Yet, as critical as the Reverend was to the origins of this absence, he abided by the canon and never used fragrant essences during private moments of prayer or during public collective worship.

However, the theologically prescribed absence of incense from authorized forms of adoration did not engender a denial on its potential for conveying the divine. Most of the Reformed Christians that I interacted with, either believers or priests, acknowledged the "ability" of bukhūr in mediating an encounter with the transcendent. One of them was Edmond, an elegantly dressed man in his 40s, whom I met him during a baptism service in a Rum Orthodox Church. He had been a Protestant all his life, yet he could not remain numb to the fragrant smoke engulfing both of us as the baptismal liturgy unfolded. The sweet-smelling odors in the synesthetic environment characteristic to the Byzantine rite attuned his body and mind to prayer. "Even as a Protestant, I can say bukhūr helps me to pray sometimes."[165]

Edmond's experience, triggered by an immersion in the fragrant liturgical medium, required a negotiation of the Protestant principles he ascribed to. "It is a way of expressing our feelings to God…so there is nothing wrong with bukhūr in itself. It is there in the Bible.

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[163] Ibid.
[164] For a more in depth analysis of this "competition" between the Protestants, the Maronites and the Rum Orthodox, see Kassir, *Beirut*, 180-203; Badr, "American Protestant Missionary Beginnings in Beirut," 211-240.
[165] Interview with Edmond, Reformed Protestant.

You can find it even in the New Testament, in the Revelations somewhere…"[166] Here, the scriptural authority used as a Protestant argument for the austere environment of the liturgy,[167] became a source of argumentation for bukhūr as a sensorial incentive to prayer. Edmond's positive attitude towards the usage of incense was supported by his wife, Leila. For her, the usage of incense was entitled if its sweet smell generated a positive, prayer-conducive transformation in the believer:

> I believe there is nothing wrong with bukhūr...even in my church as a Protestant Church. Personally, I do not mind using it. But if people, when they smell it, perceive it as strange and not good…this would not help us to pray, actually it would make the opposite.[168]

In the case of the Maronite and the Rum Orthodox liturgical rites, bukhūr as the odor of Christ engenders an absence-presence paradox. As the fragrant smoke invades the church signaling the start of the liturgy, the invisible divine becomes present to the senses through smell (the odor) and sight (the smoke).[169] The same paradox of presence and absence finds expression in the material environment of the Protestant church, where bukhūr is not used. On a Sunday morning, after going through the omnipresent military barricades around the Grand Serail (headquarters of the Sunni Prime Minister of Lebanon), I reached the National Evangelical Church of Beirut. Gothic-oriental in architecture, the building shared a freshly green courtyard with the center of the National Conservatory. As I stepped in, shades of bright green gave way to shades of mellow brown, trees and plants gave way to wood and concrete, the noises of the streets gave way to peaceful silence.

The space inside the National Evangelical Church of Beirut has been characterized by believers of other faiths as sober and understated. "When an Orthodox woman or man

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[166] Ibid.

[167] "When the Protestants read the New Testament, they do not see colors in the Church, they do not see candles, they do not see incense…so they do not use it." Fragment from the interview with Reverend Ramez, National Evangelical Church.

[168] Leila was a Reformed Protestant too. She was also present at the baptismal liturgy in the Rum Orthodox Church, December 21, 2014.

[169] This aspect was developed in subchapter 1, "The Transfiguration of Bukhūr: Rum Orthodox and Maronite Rituals."

enters our church, they feel it is very dry and empty…only the Cross." The absence of images, of bukhūr, of imposing decorations and clerical garments created an idea of physical emptiness.[170] However, the negative connotation implied by words such as "dry" or "austere" found a positive expression for the Reformed Protestants. "The focus in the liturgy is always to think about the Word of God and Christ, rather than use any elements and materials." In this frame, this very material emptiness represented a medium aiding in the apprehension of the divine. Unlike the synesthetic "fullness" of the Byzantine rite, it is the emptiness of the Protestant church that sways the experience of the divine. In other words, Christ becomes present by being materially absent.[171]

Protestant respondents apprehended the divine during a ritual that they defined as understandable and based on reason. Here the synesthetic experience mesmerizing the Rum Orthodox or the Maronite believer gives way to a ration-based encounter with the transcendent. "It is more when I understand, when I am conscious, I feel more close to God. So we encounter the mystery, but with our mind…"[172] Yet, even in this seemingly sole rational focus of the liturgy, one can speak about a process of embodiment. Reformed Protestants not only attune their minds, but also their bodies to the unfolding collective worship.

As the Sunday service started in the National Evangelical Church, the entire community of present believers stood up to praise God by singing. Then, the air filled with the humming sound of textile as they simultaneously sat down. When the preaching time came, they moved their heads in unison, following the pastor as he approached the pulpit. During the preaching, most of the present believers kept their sight and attention on the pastor conveying the message. This listening mode triggered a one-way horizontal axis of

[170] Rima Nasrallah et al., "Itinerant Feasting: Eastern Christian Women Negotiating (Physical) Presence in the Celebration of Easter," *Exchange* 42 (2013): 313-342.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Interview with Reverend Ramez, National Evangelical Church.

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communication, where the community listened as the pastor preached. In all of these examples, those present employed their bodies to engage in the liturgy and to orient themselves in the church.[173]

Moreover, the attuning of their bodies to the simple, yet present choreography of the Reformed Protestant liturgy was aided by the structure of the church too. The benches were arranged as for a lecture, directing the body and the sight of the believers towards the pastor, who was preaching the message facing the community. This was in stark contrast with the Rum Orthodox liturgy, where there was a gestural and verbal communication between the priest and the community of believers. They engaged in a dialogue where each part knew its role and lines by heart. This communication was also characterized by movements that were either staged or not. For instance, during the Christmas liturgy that I attended, Rum Orthodox moved to and fro in and out of the Saint Mary's Orthodox Church of Dormition. This movement was hectic, and sometimes disturbing. As an example of staged motion, Father Nicola would come in and out of the altar, either establishing eye-contact with the believers or focusing on the performance of the liturgy.

Last but not least, even though bukhūr is not used in their liturgical rite, the Protestant interviewees appropriated the discourse on the odor of Christ. Interestingly, they ascribed a different source for triggering the olfactory perception of the divine. It was no longer bukhūr as an external mediating agent, but the ethical behavior of the believers. "When people see our good works and deeds, then they would smell Christ. When they see that we are helping them or the poor, then they would see and smell Christ."[174] Here another expression of the strong connection between olfaction and morality[175] takes shape, where the moral uprightness of the believers emanates the most beautiful odor in the world, the

[173] Nasrallah, "Itinerant Feasting."
[174] Interview Edmond, Reformed Protestant.
[175] Donald Tuzin "Base Notes: Odor, Breath and Moral Contagion in Ilahita," in Drobnick, *The Smell Culture Reader*, 59-67.

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odor of Christ. This spiritual fragrance is not ascribed to a particular denomination, to a physical space or to a prescribed ritual. Since each human being is capable of good deeds, the potential for "emanating the odor of Christ" becomes an intrinsic attribute of Man's will.

In the end, the exceptionalism of Beiruti Reformed Protestants does not reside in the inclusion or the exclusion of bukhūr in their liturgical rite. It is rather connected to the way they negotiate their identity as Arab Reformed Protestants. By their affiliation to the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, they ascribe to a religious canon where sensorial stimuli such as incense are vehemently avoided. At the same time, they do not deny the potential of these stimuli in conveying the divine. Also, they themselves do not use bukhūr, yet appropriate a discourse on this fragrant practice characteristic to other religious denominations. It is this chain of negotiations that makes the Reformed Protestant community in Beirut a stimulating topic of research.

III.3. The Scented Social Code of Sunni Muslims in Beirut.

Islam rose alongside the spice trade routes of the Levant, its historical and theological evolution encompassing a fusion between words and fragrances.[176] It also emerged in the Middle Eastern cultural environment, characterized by the scented traditions and rituals of major pagan, Judaic and Christian religions. As such, Islam has been no stranger to this love for the fragrant.

This importance of good smells has been gradually incorporated in authoritative texts such as the Qur'an, hadith and *fiqh*. For instance, the prestigious camphor essence (*kāfūr*) is described in the Holy Book as the drink flavor to be enjoyed by the righteous in

[176] For a more elaborate analysis on the connection between the Muslim Conquest and the aromatic trade, see Amar Zohar and Efrain Lev, "Trends in the Use of Perfumes and Incense in the Near East after the Muslim Conquest," *The Royal Asiatic Society,* 3:23 (2013): 11-30; Anya King, "The Importance of Imported Aromatics in Arabic Culture: Illustrations from Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Poetry," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 67:3 (2008): 175-189.

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the Garden of Eden.[177] Yet, the Qur'an makes minimal reference to the olfactory in comparison with the hadith. The latter abounds in accounts bespeaking the use of fragrant essences and incense as medical ailments, body oils or signs of friendship and hospitality. Here the Prophet advises his followers to never refuse a gift of perfume, to use Indian incense to cure tonsils diseases or to perfume their bodies with sweet-smelling oils.[178]

In written Muslim tradition, the importance of good smells is associated not only with medicine, social interactions or personal hygiene, but also with authoritative spaces. In this sense, the mosque is a place of worship where bukhūr has been traditionally burnt. The history of this fumigatory practice interweaves the aesthetical aspect of sanitization with the religious ritual of purification. One expression of this intertwinement is found in *Fiqh al-sunna*, an influential, five volume *fiqh* collection of the Egyptian Azhar shaykh Sayyid Sabiq (d.2000), also member of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose work is widely cited, not only by Islamists:

> "ʿAʾisha reports that the Prophet ordered that the mosque be built in residential areas and that they be cleaned and perfumed. This is related by Ahmand, Abu Dawud, at-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, NS Ibn Hibban with a good chain. Abu Dawud's wording is: "He ordered us to build the mosques in the residential areas, to build them well and to purify them." Abdullah would burn incense when 'Umar would sit on the pulpit.[179]

The sweet fragrances of Paradise preferred by the Prophet (e.g. rosewater, ambergris, musk, camphor) would come together with the Qur'anic recitations from the minbar (pulpit in a mosque) to scent the divine word.[180] As verses were being recited from high platforms, incense burnt and drifted with the words across the open space of the

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[177] See Qur'an 76 (*Surat Al-'Insān*): 5 [translation in English by ʿAbdullah Yusuf ʿAli].
[178] See al-Bukhari, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 7, book 71, hadith 613, or vol. 3, book 47, hadith 756 [translation in English by Muhammad Muhsin Khan], accessed May 1, 2015, http://sunnah.com/.
[179] Sa'eed Dabas and Kayani, Sayyid Sabiq's *Fiqh al-sunna,* vol. 2, chap. 7, archive.org.
[180] "The afterlife paradise is described in great detail in the Qur'ān and other Islamic writings as a great, gated garden or park that is permeated by the scent of musk, camphor, and ginger. It is graced with fountains and abundant rivers of water, milk, honey, and wine flow through it." Source: "house," *Encyclopedia of Islam,* 311-313.

mosque. The words of Allah became audile, visible and fragrant, these sensorial stimuli drawing the devout into a relation with the divine. This practice enjoyed historical continuity and it was institutionalized during the Ottoman Empire. Then the mosque or the mausolea would hire a *buhurcu, a* person who was in charge with purchasing bukhūr and censing it on Friday and other holy days.[181]

Nevertheless, my participatory observations revealed that this fumigatory ritual is seldom practiced in the Sunni mosques of Beirut. It was the time for the Friday congregational prayer (*ṣalāt al-jum`a)* when I entered the Beydun Mosque in Nasra neighborhood. I was offered a black hijab while a diligent Muslim woman walked me through the steps of putting it on. Next I was escorted towards the space for prayer destined for women. The muezzin's voice calling to prayer (*adhān*) was still echoing in my ears, as my eyes were captivated by the Arabic calligraphy and the colorful geometrical patters on the walls. Yet, no trace of fragrant smoke, only a waft of sweet, flowery perfume.

As the prayer finished, news of the presence of a foreigner in the mosque spread and the imam kindly invited me in his modest office. On my question related to the present usage of bukhūr in the mosque, he smiled and told me it was a habit of the past. He argued that most of the religious meaning this practice might have had was lost. Plus, incense was quite expensive to be purchased from the small budget of the mosque. As a solution, bukhūr was often replaced by an air freshener (Airwick) to disperse the foul physical smells, prior to prayer times.

This aesthetic frame of evaluation was adopted by practicing Sunni believers when talking about the presence of perfume in the mosque. The smell was there to create a "nice atmosphere", where believes would not be disturbed by the foul odors of those who did not

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[181] Nina Ergin, "The Fragrance of the Divine: Ottoman Incense Burners and Their Context," *Art Bulletin*, xcvi: 1 (2014): 70-97.

perform their ablutions rigorously. "I think it is for relaxation, for people to have a nice smell when they pray."[182] This nice smell lingers after the performance of the obligatory prayers too. The flowery scent drifting in the atmosphere of the Muhammad Al-Amin Mosque as believers gathered to celebrate the Birth of the Prophet *(Mawlid al-Nabī)* was still present after the ritualized collective prayer. Their bodies, previously attuned to prescribed movements, relaxed and found comfortable sitting positions. At this moment, the gender ascribed areas for prayer became socializing spots for adults and playground for children.[183] In this context, the smell eased social relations between the Sunnis coming together in the mosque as a place of worship, education or socialization.

A potential reason for this predominant socio-aesthetic evaluation of bukhūr is the lack of an elaborate collective worship in Sunni Islam. In the Eastern Christian rites analyzed in subchapter III.1, "The Transfiguration of Bukhūr: Rum Orthodox and Maronites Rituals," the liturgical rituals allow for a more comprehensive ceremonial usage of bukhūr. This is defined by a theology, authorized and perfected through a history of staged enactment. The burning of incense fits in at particulates moments in the liturgical scenario and it can be performed only by church officials. These requirements are tacitly agreed upon by the believers and the priests engaging in this collective practice of worship.

In Sunni Islam, prayer is more individual-based and it is not restricted to a prescribed place, but to a set time. Worship is recommended, yet not confined to the mosque. A written source where this principle finds authority is the hadith "The whole of the earth has been rendered for me a Mosque: pure and clean".[184] Muslims can pray within the confinement of their homes, in the open public space or wherever they chose to pray

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[182] Fragment from a discussion with a Sunni Muslim woman whom I met in the Beydun mosque.
[183] See *Appendices*, no. 7.
[184] Paul F. Bradshaw, *New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 259.

when the time comes.[185] In certain conditions, they can even overcome the time requirement. Alia, whom I met in the Muhammad Al-Amin Mosque, was performing a double prayer since she was going to travel during the time of the next required prayer. What is more, these prayers performed five times a day are not mediated like in the case of the Christian liturgy, by a priest.[186] As such, these particularities of worship in Islam were not conducive to the development of a rich usage of incense in communal forms of worship. Consequently, there was no need for a "theological handbook" on how to burn bukhūr or what does it stand for. In the words of the Sunni shaykh Muhammad, a religious court magistrate in Beirut, "Islam did not create the need for a theology of bukhūr".[187]

From this perspective, it would be difficult to speak of a sacred smellscape within the confinements of the mosques that I covered during my field research. Referring to the "sacred", there is no ritualistic frame where the fragrant smoke of bukhūr can become a vicarious medium for experiencing the divine presence. Related to the "smellscape", the intermittent seasonal usage of incense prevents its fragrance from becoming place-related or from being easily associated with fumigation.[188] Nevertheless, Muslims use bukhūr not only as fumigations, but also as perfume, oil or scented crystals. My interview with Rashid, a Sunni perfumer in Beirut, was conducted in a fragrant atmosphere of home-made bukhūr that he sprayed from a customized bottle. Shaykh Muhammad took out a bottle of expensive perfume of bukhūr from his office cabinet, as a proof for the variety of forms that this substance can take in Islam.[189]

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[185] Information acquired during my interview with Sunni shaykh Muhammad, a religious court magistrate in Beirut, December, 29, 2014.

[186] As already mentioned, an exception to this rule is the Friday congregational prayer, which can be guided by the imam or another elder of the community who knows the steps of the ritual.

[187] Interview with Sunni shaykh Muhammad.

[188] However, the repetitive usage of air fresheners could lead to the creation of a smellscape that believers might connect to the mosque, the congregational Friday prayer or the socializing moments before and after the prayers.

[189] I further develop the usage of bukhūr as crystals or perfume in chapter IV, subchapter 3: "Rashid's House: The Foul Odor of the Jinni and the Sweet Fragrance of Bukūr"

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This variety is also present in the religious practices of the Muslims. The concept of worship (*ʿibādah*) may not be confined to the mosque, but it is surely restricted to a specific state of the human body, which becomes a territory framed by the most sacred values and beliefs of the Muslim society.[190] The salat requires a purification of the bodies and minds of those who aspire to encounter the divine.[191] In the words of one of the respondents, "Half of Islam is about cleanliness." This purification is achieved through a series of prescribed gestural and practical aspects of worship, which include the washing and perfuming of specific body parts. For example, the verb *ightasala* has a broad semantic range, meaning "to wash oneself to purify oneself by ablutions" as well as to "rub up with perfumes."[192]

In the context of these ablutions, bukhūr as perfume becomes an instrument that enhances ethical feelings and behavior, at the same time being part of the aesthetic. "Maintaining oneself in good aroma and sharing it with others is not simply a means of being attractive or socially nice. It is a matter of sanctity and sin, life and death."[193] These two come together and are conducive to good social order and proper worship. In this sense, all of the Sunni Muslims I talked to understood perfume not only as a requirement of social etiquette but also as "part of religion". A successful perfumer for over forty year and a pious believer, Rashid was most keen on this twin character of the fragrant:

> Prophet Muhammad…the prophet not only of Islam, but of all the creatures of the world, focused on the meaning of perfumes and encouraged everyone to use perfumes. That is why he said to all of his apostles and followers: "In your earthly world, three things are most lovable to me: perfumes, women and prayers." Perfume brings also an added value for people in their social relationship.[194]

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[190] Liarte, "Le Corps," http://noesis.revues.org/1343

[191] "O, ye who believe! When ye prepare for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands (and arms) to the elbows; rub your heads (with water); and (wash) your feet to the ankles. If ye are in a state of ceremonial impurity, bathe your whole body […]." See Qur'an 5 (*Surat al-Mā'idah*): 6 [translation in English by ʿAbdullah Yusuf ʿAli].

[192] Aubaile-Sallenave, "Bodies, Odors and Perfumes," 392.

[193] Susan Rasmussen, "Making Better 'Scents' in Anthropology: Aroma in Tuareg Socio-Cultural Systems and the Shaping of Ethnography," *Anthropological Quarterly,* 72:2 (1999): 65.

[194] Interview with Rashid, a Sunni Muslim perfumer, January 5, 2015.

Here, the habit of perfuming oneself as a socially recommended practice becomes religiously prescribed through the authority of the Prophet. Rashid uses perfumes not only because they are a sign of physical cleanliness and enhance social interaction, but also because he wants to emulate the behavior and beliefs of the Messenger of Allah.

However, as my interview with Rashid developed, another level in the connection between the social and the religious unfolded. This unfolding was gradual, as was the inclusion of his wife and daughter-in-law in the discussion. Initially, they framed this usage of bukhūr in a discourse on social etiquette. "If you meet someone who has a good smell, it is better than someone who has a foul smell."[195] They only spoke about the social propriety of people to smell good when they pray in the mosque, evaluating the smell of bukhūr a social stabilizer.[196] Then, at a certain moment, Rashid said:

> Being clean [perfumed] is very good for angels to be besides you. Being dirty, they will not be happy with you; with your nature….they like cleanliness, because it is half of religion. But not many Muslims know this….you must have noticed it. Sometimes people pray with us in the mosque on Friday, which is the Holy Day, and they stink to Heaven.[197]

Here the physical cleanliness and the perfuming of the body become strongly intertwined with spiritual cleanliness. At this moment, the line between perfume as a social stabilizer and bukhūr as a spiritual stabilizer became blurred. Rashid evaluates this substance not only according to social etiquette, but also in the paradigm of pollution and purification, where bukhūr acquires a moral and spiritual dimension.[198] The physical fragrance of a perfumed cleanliness becomes a conveyer of spiritual cleanliness, while physical foul odors denote a spiritual defilement.

[195] Ibid.; this was an answer of Rashid's wife.
[196] Dwight, "Man as a Ceremonialist," 126-130.
[197] Interview with Rashid, Sunni Muslim.
[198] For an analysis of the connection between purification and pollution, see Richard Y. Hibbert, "Defilement and Cleansing: A Possible Approach to Christian Encounter," *Missiology* 36: 343 (2008). 343-355.

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Through this homology between physical cleanliness and spiritual purification, the olfactory creates a vertical connection between man and the sacred. In the example above, "being clean" denotes a spiritual purity that sways the angels to descend, while the foul smell of those who did not perform the ablutions or did not use perfume "stinks" of defilement to Heaven. Thus, the physical foul is internalized as a source of pollution, making it easy to connect it to morality and sin.[199] Moreover, the olfactory impacts on a horizontal social dimension as the people who smell bad engender odoriferous and social defilement, acting as destabilizing agents. Conversely, by smelling presentably, the moral and the social order are preserved.

Last but not least, the purity-impurity classification depends on "a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order".[200] By now I have only mentioned the role of bukhūr as a source of purification and conveyer of spiritual cleanliness. Yet, the same substance can become a source of pollution and defilement when taking into consideration the representations of the body in Islam. The Qur'an stipulates that women should "lower their gaze and guard their modesty" by "drawing their veil over their bosoms" and by "not display their beauty" but to certain categories of individuals.[201] In this frame, all my Sunni interviewees considered the usage of perfume by women as a "display of beauty" and a potential source of temptation. As a solution, women should employ fragrant essences only within the confinements of their home and in the presence of their family.[202] In cases when these spatial prescriptions were broken, they evaluated this infringement as a moral defilement. For instance, on my question why women are not allowed to use perfume,

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[199] Low, "Ruminations on Smell," 397-417.
[200] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 36.
[201] Qur'an 24 (*Surat An-Nūr*): 31 [translation in English by ʿAbdullah Yusuf ʿAli].
[202] Rashid made an interesting allegory to express the temptation potential of perfume and the status of women who use these fragrances outside the prescribed contexts. While a woman who "keeps her modesty" and uses perfume only within the domestic environment is like a private car, the one who breaks the rules is like a taxi, "inviting everyone for a ride".

Rashid responded "Prophet Muhammad said that any woman who puts perfume on purpose will be written as committing adultery in the eye of Allah".[203] In this case, the smell associated with a spiritual purification when applied on men becomes a source of defilement when applied on women, outside the prescribed space.

In the end, the usage of bukhūr in Sunni Islam comes in many shapes and sizes. Its smell can ascend as smoke, it can disperse as perfume particles or it can stick as scented oil. Yet, none of these "shapes" are intrinsically connected to a mosque so as to witness the creation of a sacred smellscape within the confinements of this place of worship. Conversely, the medium that is strongly associated with these varieties of bukhūr is the human body. In the religious aesthetics of Islam, the human body becomes a "sacred smellscape" where bukhūr is representative of both bodily and spiritual cleanliness. For the Sunni Muslims, employing perfume is not only a requirement of social propriety, but also a religious prescription. In this dual framework, its scented fragrance becomes a sign of external physical cleanliness and a symbol of internal spiritual purity.

To sum up, this chapter focused on the authorized sacred smellscapes within the walls of churches and mosques in Beirut. It revealed that the construction of these smellscapes is framed not only within the confinements of official places of worship, but also during enacted official religious rituals. When intertwined, these two frames guide the religious experience of pious believers.

The Christian liturgy is a medium where theological principles are ritually enacted and appropriated by believers through negotiation and embodiment. During the liturgical rituals of the Maronites and the Rum Orthodox, the theological principle of bukhūr as the "odor of Christ" is enacted through the rich and regular usage of incense. Believers immerse

[203] Interview with Rashid, Sunni Muslim.

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in the sacred smellscape created and experienced as both a presence of the divine and a medium for encountering the divine. In the sensational forms triggered by this fragrant medium, the believer attunes his body to the prescribed liturgical choreography and to the synesthetic environment. Yet, this attuning has to be completed by an internal transformation for the religious experience to be authenticated.

In the case of the Arab Reformed Protestants, it was precisely the lack of bukhūr in the liturgical practices that conveyed the presence of the divine. It created a "sanitized" space where the transcendent became present through the absence of bukhūr or other sensorially stimulating agents. Yet, my interviews revealed that the lack of incense in the liturgical ritual did not necessarily imply a denial of its potential to trigger a religious experience. In the case of the Sunni Muslims, the employment of bukhūr as perfume provided the frame for the human body to be analyzed as a form of sacred "smellscape" in its performative actions. In the case of the ablutions prior to the obligatory prayers, the fragrant smell of bukhūr as perfume can be a conveyer of both social propriety and spiritual purity.

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Chapter IV. Bukhūr and the Everyday Smellscapes of Beirut.

In the words of the late Lebanese historian Samir Kassir, Beirut is a "Westernized Mediterranean Arab metropolis".[204] One source of the syncretic character of this city is its history as a main Levantine trade port. In Chapter II, *A Tale of Beirut: Between a Safe Haven and a Battleground*, I briefly mentioned the identity of this polis as a port, characterized by a diversity of social, cultural and economic encounters. In what follows, I will dwell further on this feature of Beirut in order to foreground the public and private uses of bukhūr, outside the consecrated sacred spaces.

A channel of communication between the varied cultures and regions around the Mediterranean Sea, Beirut has represented an entry-exit point for manufactures, aromatics, knowledge and religious ideas. Its fame as a metropolis in the Ottoman Empire was established by the mid-19th century, when Beirut-Damascus became the main line for international trade in the Eastern Mediterranean.[205] The Industrial Revolution in Europe triggered a boom in demand and the manufacturers and the merchants on the Eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea had the necessary resources to supply. This expansion of trade translated into new economic opportunities, rapid urbanization, state-imposed reforms and the emergence of a dominant class of local merchants and financiers.[206]

In 1887, Beirut became the main port city in Levant and the capital of a *vilayet* (Ottoman administrative division) with the same name. It soon evolved into a commercial hub for traders, missionaries and travelers from Europe, the United States or the Arab world, transiting the city or even settling here. The engendered commercial, social and religious exchanges contributed to a syncretism nurtured by open-minded worldliness, but also

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[204] Kassir, *Beirut*, 28.
[205] Traboulsi, *A History*, 52.
[206] Kassir, *Beirut*, 28-29.

refrained traditionalism.[207] The same syncretism is reflected in the cultural identity of the city. Its Phoenician, Greek and Roman vestiges intermingle with early 20th century architectural expressions of Ottoman, French and occasionally Russian influences. All these aspects reflect the many historical layers that make up what Beirut is today.

Akin to this multifaceted identity, Beirut has been the inhabiting space for a diversity of religious communities, their close contact being inevitable in the syncretic environment of this polis. As it was portrayed in Chapter II, the recent history of their peaceful and/or violent interaction materialized in a confessionally-based political system and in an urban topography imprinted by individual and collective marks of confessionalism. One such confessional mark made the subject of Chapter III, where I investigated the authorized practices of worship that imply the usage of bukhūr in Maronite Christianity, Rum Orthodoxy, Reformed Protestantism and Sunni Islam.

The attention of this chapter shifts from the authorized sacred smellscapes confined to official spaces of worship (e.g. church, mosque) and rituals (e.g. liturgy, salat) to domestic sacred smellscapes of the private and profane public sphere. Here I research into how believers sense and make sense of their usage of bukhūr in their homes, revealing how this employment is personalized by memories, experience and socio-cultural background. This investigation into the private usage of bukhūr and the domestic sacred smellscapes is framed in a larger context of an olfactory aesthetics characteristic to the Eastern Mediterranean space and to Lebanon. In the specific socio-historical conditions of the region and the country, the olfactory is not only a medium for experiencing the sacred, but also an instrument of social, moral and economic evaluation. For a comprehensive picture, the reader is swayed to step outside the context of a Christian Sunday liturgy or a Muslim

[207] Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, 1-19.

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Friday prayer into the olfactory urban geography of Beirut, then into the homes of practicing Christians and Sunni Muslims.

IV.1. The Olfactory Aesthetics of an Arab Metropolis.

Present-day Beirut is a *pastiche* of crumbling historical buildings and a constantly developing infrastructure of commercial and financial facilities. Grey steel-and-glass skyscrapers rise in Downtown Beirut as evidence for the luxury put up for sale by rich foreign investors. The same skyscrapers stand as witness for the reckless construction projects undertaken in this area. Here apartments are barely inhabited, offices are seldom rented and retail spaces often display dusty *for sale* signs.[208] The scenic beauty that brought its fame as the so-called "Switzerland of the Levant"[209], its ancient historical sites, the reckless driving and the ever-present security threat imprint a long lasting memory of Beirut. But what will probably linger most in one's memories are the fragrant and the foul of this sea port.

Beirut can be defined by a rich olfactory that is the legacy of its history as a port in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Here the trade with spices, perfumes, herbs and medicine of Oriental origin brought fame to Arabia, prompting Herodotus to write praising stories on the richness of "felix Arabia".[210] Aromatic substances and perfumes ranged among the most precious commodities of ancient times. This love for the fragrant determined Pliny the Elder to declare that "in Arabia there is surprising demand for foreign scents, which are imported from abroad…so covetous are they (mortals) of what belongs to other people".[211]

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[208] See *Appendices*, no. 8.
[209] Kassir, *Beirut,* 28.
[210] Béatrice Casseau, "L'Encens au 7e et 8e Siècle: Un Marqueur du Commerce en Méditerranée ? academia.edu, accessed March, 4, 2015. See also Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh.*
[211] Pliny, *Natural History*, Vol. 4, Book XII, trans. by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library no. 370 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945), 59.

Frankincense and myrrh ranged among the most common types of aromatic resins traded by merchants of the Arabian Peninsula and enjoyed by ancient Mediterranean civilizations such as the Egyptians, the Greeks or the Romans.

The Muslim conquest of the East in the 7th century opened new trading routes, its markets being flooded with exotic perfumes from the vast region named "India".[212] Beirut became a transit port for new spices and aromatics (ambergris, musk, and agarwood) coming from the Extreme Orient. The demand for these fragranced substances was alimented by a culture where the foul odors were not only disagreeable, but dangerous for one's health. The Greek physician Galen counseled against entering a house where the air was putrid for danger of illness, while the 11th century Persian polymath Ibn-Sina studied odors as indicators of human ailments.[213] In this culture, fragrant herbs and substances were endowed with preventive and curative powers to counteract the displeasing and malevolent effects of the foul.

While vestiges of this love for aromatics are present in today's Beirut, the cosmopolitan aspiration of this metropolis engenders a propensity for assimilation of international culture. The global fast-food chains, the vibrant nightlife and the international coffee houses give access to a new olfactory experience to residents and tourists in this Arab metropolis. The enticing smell of pastry shops specialized in both European and Oriental specialties mixes with the pungent smell of fuel from the bustling urban traffic. Mesmerizing tea and coffee wafts from every corner shop mingle with the foul odors of decay, humidity and dirt in the "quartiers traditionnels"[214] of the city.

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[212] Zohar and Lev, "Trends in the Use of Perfumes," 11-30.
[213] Reinarz, *Past Scents*, "Introduction", Kindle.
[214] Sign posts which read "quartier traditionnel" mark the entrance into neighborhoods that preserve the architectural heritage of the city, such as Ottoman-style mansions with trifore (triple-arched) windows or the French colonial mansions.

One such "quartier" is Zarif, a neighborhood predominantly inhabited by Sunni Muslims. If you lack a good spatial orientation, you will probably get lost in the labyrinth of narrow, look-alike streets. Here, vendors sell fresh orange and tangerine juice by the side of the road. The wafts of freshly squeezed natural juice mix with the pungent smell of litter and debris scattered by the side of the streets. The same mix characterizes the urban structure of this area. Decaying and crumbling houses stand next to newly constructed buildings that are surrounded by green spaces, palm trees and flowers.[215] This rich olfactory experience abruptly stops as you walk towards the sea and reach Beirut Central District (BCD), an enclave of sanitized luxury constructed under the slogan "Where Senses Breathe".[216] Yet, this anosmic episode quickly fades away as you approach Achrafieh, a predominantly Christian-inhabited neighborhood. Here streets appear wider and cleaner and houses stand next to ten-story buildings.[217] The olfactory is not as rich as in Zarif, yet sweet fragrances of bukhūr fill the streets every morning from shops close to the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Catherine. In the words of one of the shopkeepers, "a short prayer of incense is offered to start the day well".

The presence of this culturally and historically grounded rich olfactory has contributed to the development of an olfactory aesthetics quite different from the one characterizing the "deodorized" European societies. The odorless profile of the latter is the result of a proliferation of sanitizing campaigns registered in the modern history of Western Europe. These campaigns were gradually institutionalized through social policy and resulted in the redesign of public space, cityscapes and urban infrastructure.[218] In contrast, Arab societies lay great emphasis on the olfactory and the rich usage of natural perfumes, incense and aromatizes. Individuals take pleasure in scenting themselves, their clothes and the

[215] See *Appendices*, no. 9.
[216] Ibid., no. 10.
[217] Ibid., no. 11.
[218] For an in-depth analysis, see Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant*, 1986.

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household in their everyday life or during rituals of passage (e.g. birth, marriage, death).[219] Fragrant odors thus become indicators of a state of well-being, happiness and health.

In this social framework, the status of bukhūr as a socio-cultural symbol is constructed across the process of production and consumption.[220] Together with the narratives constructed around it, with the emotions that encode it and the objects that ground it in the material environment, bukhūr mediates social encounters. This love for bukhūr as a form of social contentment was expressed by the Sunni shaykh Muhammad through both practice and discourse. No sooner had I entered the office where he worked as a religious court magistrate, than I was immersed in a smellscape of sweet, strong bukhūr perfume and lemongrass tea. As an explanation to my question on the role of smell, he declared:

> Each Muslim has to use the perfume when he goes to the mosque, when he encounters other young people and when he travels. If he meets people that the does not know, he must behave accordingly and perfume. The bukhūr can also reflect the propriety of the person who visits the others.[221]

This "sensory sociality"[222] of events was reflected in the enticing olfactory experience unfolding during the interview with Rashid, the Sunni Muslim perfumer, and his family. The one hour and a half conversation was accompanied by the smell of lemongrass tea that I was welcomed with, by the mildly scented *mlabbas*[223] that I received for the Birth of the Prophet (*Mawlid al-Nabī*) and, finally, by the particles of bukhūr sprayed in the already scented air of the apartment. Another event when the olfactory became an agent of social cohesion and of cultural emplacement was the interview with Salima, a pious Rum Orthodox and a University Professor living in Beirut. Giving course to a Christmas lunch

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[219] Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies,* 79.
[220] Annelies Moors, "Popularizing Islam: Muslims and Materiality – Introduction," *Material Religion* 8:3 (2012): 276.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Pink, *Doing Sensorial Ethnography,* 75.
[223] *Mlabbas* are sugar coated almonds that are shared during events such as weddings, newborn events, pilgrimages or other celebrations. They are usually wrapped in ribbon-tied sachets that are offered to guests, family and friends.

invitation, I reached Sassine Square, an affluent area in the Eastern part of Beirut. Street-corner shrines of Virgin Mary stood witness of the Christian imprint of this area, while icons of saints were hanging by front doors, at the border between public and private.[224]

Once in Salima's small yet stylish apartment, I conducted the interview surrounded by French-inspired household furniture, attuned to the voice of the famous Lebanese singer Fairuz and mesmerized by the multitude of smells from the scented pastry, candies and aromatic leaves on the table. After lunch, in the smell of Arabic coffee, I was shown the handle censer used by her family to burn incense in the house: "This is for the icons and for the house. It is not with bells and a chain….the domestic ones have a handle and not bells."[225] In these cases, the environment where the interviews were conducted and my own emplacement revealed the rich everyday olfactory of my respondents and their traditional hospitality…a combination that "fashioned a distinctive art of living".[226]

IV.2. The "Odorous Others"[227] – Smells as Markers of Identification.

Along this sociability of smells, Beirutis express a propensity to employ the olfactory to communicate, evaluate or foster contentment or discontent. This openness towards smells engenders an olfactory aesthetics where well-being, trustworthiness, social status or religious affiliation is evaluated according to the pungent foul and the sweet-smelling fragrant.[228] In the Lebanese olfactory-conscious society, odors, perfumes and malodorous fragrances have acquired a privileged position as markers of social and cultural identities. Olfactory codes contribute to the construction of "oneness" and "otherness" not

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[224] See *Appendices,* no. 10.
[225] Interview with Salima, a Rum Orthodox and a University Professor, December 23, 2014. For a picture of the censer, see *Appendices,* no. 1.
[226] Kassir, *Beirut,* 385.
[227] Reinarz, *Past Scents,* Chapt. 3, "Odorous Others: Race and Smell," Kindle.
[228] Low, "Presenting the Self," 607-631.

only by differentiating between *us* and *them*, but also by establishing social and moral rankings.[229]

At first sight, Beirut can be characterized as a multi-confessional environment where more than eighteen officially recognized religious denominations co-exist. Yet, a closer look at the social representations on these inter- and intra- denominational interactions reveals socio-political hierarchies carved along confessional lines. While interviewing practicing believers from the three Christian denominations under study, one line of discourse arose recurrently. This line reflected an association between education, social status and religious affiliation. Respondents would often portray Christians (and implicitly themselves) as educated and part of a well-off social class.[230] By contrast, Sunni Muslims were generally described as a "petty bourgeois", who became rich after the Civil War (1975-1990) and developed an ambition for education.

Two often-mentioned examples of this ambition were their study of French and their enrolment in Christian schools. The latter was grounded in a belief that the education assured by the Christian colleges was of a higher quality than the one assured by the Muslim ones. For instance, Father Nicola, from the Greek Orthodox parish of Rash Beirut, stated that more than 90% of the pupils enrolled in the Saint Mary's Orthodox College were Muslims. By far, it was the Shi'a who were socially stigmatized the most by being portrayed as very poor and having low-skilled jobs. They were compared with the Druze,[231] who were briefly brought into discussion to emphasize their hermetic communal character.

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[229] Classen, "The Odor of the Other," 133-166.

[230] I registered a few instances where respondents invoked differences of social class and education between the Rum Orthodox and the Maronites. Yet, my research did not reveal enough pertinent information on this issue.

[231] The Druze are an ethno-religious community that developed out of Islam, registered mostly in Lebanon. They abide by an eclectic system of beliefs, where the principle of secrecy plays a major role. For further details, see Heinz Halm, "Druze," *Religion Past and Present, Brill Online*, accessed June 1, 2015, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/religion-past-and-present/druzeSIM_03920?s.num=0&s.q=Druze

This socio-confessional hierarchy found scarce yet intriguing olfactory expressions too. The employed olfactory codes were in tune with the paradigm of stench associated with moral decay, low-skilled occupation and illiteracy. Conversely, the fragrant became an olfactory code for high moral standards, education and righteousness.[232] While the foul smell branded the Shi'a, the strong sweet-smelling perfume was characteristic for the petty-bourgeois Sunnis, and the fragrant became a companion of the educated Christians. In this sense, Edmond declared "If he [a Muslim] is educated….[he will smell] the same as the Christians. If he is not educated, I do not know…"[233] On the other hand, the same respondents acknowledged the oversimplification of their remarks: "these are stereotypes…we are fighting very much to get rid of them" and eagerly pinpointed to the same social hierarchies within their own denominations: "You have it [social hierarchy] in both of them. You have very poor Christians and very rich, the same as with Muslims."[234]

As portrayed in Chapter II, neighborhoods in present-day Beirut are still characterized by lingering confessional identities, which were engendered and enhanced during the last Lebanese civil war. Yet, Beirutis are no longer isolated by militarized physical barriers restricting the flow of social interaction. They share a today's Beirut that is "whole" and not a patchwork of militarily secured sectarian enclaves. This co-existence implies inter-denominational close interaction, which "weakens particularism, [but] also strengthens the narcissism of small differences."[235] The usage of bukhūr becomes one such small difference as my respondents try to appropriate this substance as part of their confessional "right" practice. In Beirut, bukhūr is commonly employed by both Christians and Sunni Muslims, yet they each emphasize the particularities of their olfactory worship rituals in contrast to the other confession.

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[232] For a historical analysis of this paradigm, see Reinarz, *Past Scents,* Chapt. 3.
[233] Interview with Edmond, Reformed Protestant.
[234] Interview with Rawad, Rum Orthodox.
[235] Kassir, *Beirut*, 441.

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One form of appropriation of bukhūr involved an intrinsic identification of the fragrance with the origin of the physical substance to be burnt.[236] Odors are never fully detached from the material world. They are concentrated in the form of their source, where they are no longer vaporous, but turn into substance.[237] Such is the case of bukhūr, the very word denoting two natures. While the former designates the solid, crystalline substance, the latter refers to the fragrant smoke steaming once the substance is burnt on coal. Since the base notes of the physical smell are the same, Rum Orthodox, Maronites and even Protestants would ascribe a particular character to its material source. For example, Father Yusuf from the Saint George Maronite Cathedral ascribed a "special aroma" to the incense used by Christians, an aroma that was "given" by the place and the process of production of the physical substance. "For Christians, the incense has "a special aroma"…it is not like you take it from the shelf and use it. Part of it comes from the monasteries, they work it out, they add other smells to it."[238]

A factor that should be mentioned at this point is language. Most of my interviewes were conducted in English and French, with the exceptional cases where I was assured translation from Arabic. In this sense, the abstract, sometimes vague, answers of my respondents might be interpreted in two different, yet intertwined, frameworks. On the one hand, language might sometimes be a "primitive" tool for expressing a personal, sensorial and spiritual experience. In this sense, my respondents found it easier to engage in communion with the divine, rather than speak about it. Hence the unanimous surprise, amazement or laughter when I would ask them about the effects of bukhūr and the emotions it engenders during their time of worship. On the other hand, not all of my respondents were proficient in English or French. This aspect posed difficulties at times, when they would

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[236] Classen, "The Odor of the Other," 133-166.
[237] Gell, "Magic, Perfume, Dream…," in Drobnick, *The Smell Culture*, 402.
[238] Interview with Father Yusuf, Saint George Maronite Cathedral.

find it challenging to find the proper word in a language that was not Arabic. Yet, most of them also undertook a form of education in French or/and English and would easily change between languages to properly convey their message.[239]

Last but not least, another form of appropriation of bukhūr was through an olfactory aversion expressive of an association between smell and the confessional "other". In this frame, bukhūr used in the rituals of the other religious denominations can become a source of pollution rather than purification. For instance, the attribution of an exaggeratedly offensive odor to the incense used by Muslims can be an expression of an animosity for the confessional "other". In a slow, secretive voice, Father Nicola told me the story of a Rum Orthodox girl who went to a Muslims shaykh in a desperate time of need. As a solution to her problems, she received a sachet containing bukhūr and a piece of paper with a verse from the Qur'an. Since this proved ineffective, the girl desperately turned to Father Nicola. The latter expressed his experience of smelling the bukhūr from the sachet by saying "When I smelled it….yak. It was a great difference".[240]

His face mimicked the aversion towards the substance and its seemingly pungent smell. Father Nicola persuaded the girl to go to the kitchen and burn the received talisman. No sooner had the girl burnt it, told the Father, than all her problems disappeared. Here, the roots of the girl's problems were associated with a polluting action that Father Nicola ascribed to bukhūr. Yet, the polluting character of this fragrant substance did not reside in its strong essence, but rather in the source of its provenance. In other words, there was nothing wrong with that particular bukhūr, besides the fact that it was given by a Muslim shaykh. As a consequence of its origin, the fragrant substance became associated with the

[239] An interesting linguistic trop that they would recurrently use when something was difficult to explain, an obvious or a delicate topic was the interjection *"yani"*, which can roughly be translated as "it means" or "that is so say".
[240] Interview with Father Nicola, from the Rum Orthodox parish of Ras Beirut, December 24, 2014.

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difficulties of the girl. Its burning represented the key to the solution of her problems, assuring also the purification from the odorous confessional "other".

In the end, from the confinements of a mosque or a church, I stepped into the everyday olfactory culture of Beirut. Here streets of neighborhoods such as Zarif or Achrafieh reflected confessional affiliations and a rich olfactory culture. This sensorial character engendered by cultural and historical conditions was also reflected in sketches of social, confessional or economic identities. The markers of identification used by Christian respondents were strongly connected with the olfactory-conscious character of Lebanese society and culture. In this frame, bukhūr and its attached symbolic representations became a code of confessional identification and differentiation from the Muslim "other".

IV.3. Rashid's House: The Foul Odor of the Jinni and the Sweet Fragrance of Bukhūr.

From the mesmerizing odors wafting in the urban landscape of this Arab metropolis, I shift perspective to the private space of the Sunni Muslims and, ultimately, to their domestic olfactory experiences of bukhūr. I shall touch upon the role of the domestic space in Islam and focus on a particularly intriguing aspect: the olfactory of the invisible jinni and the sensational forms engendered by this Arab folk belief emerging in the Sunni milieu. However, before engaging in this analysis, a clarification is in need. The popular belief in the lore of the jinn is not necessarily specific to the Muslims that I interviewed. Christians too believe in the existence of these entities and referred to them as "evil spirits" during the interviews. In this sense, the jinni is a product of Arabic culture rather than of a specific religious denomination. Yet, what prompted me to choose the Sunnis was their recurrent reference to these entities and the beliefs constructed around them. In this sense,

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the jinni was one of the main topics of discussion not only during my interview with the Sunni perfumer Rashid, but also with the Sunni shaykh Muhammad.

It had been raining all day and the pungent smell of moisture and humidity reminded me of my first day in Beirut. An idea of J. Douglas Porteous echoed in my head "When one studies smells, it must take into consideration its habitual effect".[241] Without realizing, I had gotten accustomed to the olfactory of Beirut and what was initially unfamiliar and unpleasant became pleasantly familiar. Umar, my translator and the director of Islam-Forum[242] arrived at our established meeting point and interrupted my train of thoughts. He was to mediate my interview with Rashid, a Sunni Muslim with a thirty-year background as a perfumer. The moment we entered his house, Rashid kindly pressed his hand on his heart as greeting, since he did not shake hands with a *ghair mahram* (roughly translated as a person of the opposite sex who is not an unmarriageable kin). His wife and daughter-in-law greeted me with a smile contoured by their mildly-colored hijabs. Yet, before these greetings required by social etiquette and religious prescriptions, I was struck by the smell in the air of their apartment: an odor expressive of cleanliness and love for the fragrant. It instantly reminded me of ʿAʾisha, a zealous young Sunni Muslims working for Islam-Forum, who stated:

> In Islamic tradition, we use bukhūr to make a nice atmosphere in the house. The angels like the nice fragrances, the clean places. You know, all people come to the good, clean places. So the men and angels, who are the best creatures who worship Allah, like the clean and purifying places. That is why we should keep our homes clean.[243]

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[241] Porteous, "Smellscape," 90.
[242] Islam Forum is an independent Sunni organization in Beirut. It was founded in 2001, with an official agenda aiming at "the presentation of Islam and inter-cultural dialogue". For further details, see their official site: http://islam-forum.net/ar/
[243] Interview with ʿAʾisha, a young Sunni Muslim, December 28, 2014.

As the interview with Rashid unfolded, I received the same explanation for the fragrant smell enwrapping the apartment, his wife quickly mentioning that the odor was in my honor as a guest to their house.

In Arab Muslim practice, the construction of domestic space is based on prescriptions regarding hospitality, family, privacy, spiritual life and practice. In the case of religious practice, the fact that devotion in Islam is not restricted to an official place of prayer influences the representations on the domestic space. Not only that the house of a Sunni becomes a potential location for prayer, but it is often used as such. A stimulating expression of this association between the domestic space and prayer might be found in the Arabic semantic terminology ascribed to the notion of "house". For instance, "bayt" is the common Semitic root for Arabic words referring to both a dwelling and a sanctuary. "In Arabic, the articulated *al-Bayt* is applied par excellence to the holy place at Mecca, also called *al-Bayt al-ḥarām* (sacred dwelling)."[244] In this frame, Muslims inhabit not just a physical space that they call a house, but an environment to be regulated in the framework of the Islamic orthopraxis of prayer.[245] In the case of the latter, hadith literature regulates extensively on the religious and social aspects of the domestic space. These regulations design the domestic space as a place appropriate for daily prayers, commensality protocols or conventions related to gender and purity.[246]

Rashid's family, especially his wife and daughter-in-law, considered their home as a practical and in-handy place for performing their daily obligatory prayers. In this sense, his daughter-in-law guided me through the steps of the ablution at the sink where she would generally perform this act of purification prior to prayer. At the same time, their house was the place where his wife would never burn incense in the form of crystals as this type

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[244] J. Lecerf, "bayt," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed, accessed June 1, 2015, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/bayt-SIM_1335?s.num=2&s.q=bayt
[245] See Qur'an 16 (*An Naḥl*): 80-83 [translation in English by ʿAbdullah Yusuf ʿAli].
[246] "house," *Encyclopedia of Islam,* 311-313.

attracted the jinn. In the light of this intertwinement between officially prescribed religious practice and folk beliefs, I pay attention to the role of the olfactory in the rituals governing the communication between humans and jinn in the domestic space.

First of all, who are the jinn? They are the desert spirits of pre-Islamic Arabia, whose wild, hostile attitude towards men finds various expressions in Arabic poetry and folk literature.[247] They were gradually appropriated in official Islam, where they came to be defined as intermediary entities between the intelligible and the material world. In the Islamic cosmological hierarchy, each of the three categories of intelligent beings - humans, jinn and angels – inhabits a specific realm. While the humans made of clay populate the terrestrial world, the angels created out of light are ascribed to the celestial realm.[248] In-between these two levels is the mysterious and hidden world of the jinn, spirits bestowed with free will, created before Man and accountable of their deeds on the Day of Judgment. In the Qur'an, these spirits are addressed as communities (*umam*), their main form of organization being the tribe, an element characteristic of Arab societies.[249] For their nature, intermediate rational entities are made of "scorching winds" and "smokeless flame".[250]

In the profile of the jinn contoured by official Islam, these entities are depicted as imperceptible to the human senses, especially the visual one. "For he and his tribe see you from a position where ye cannot seem them."[251] This character trait is allegedly inherent in the very root of the world "jinn", which denotes the concealed, the invisible, and the secluded.[252] Yet, this lack of sensorial perception of the jinn is negotiated in popular Islam, where the olfactory plays a pivotal role in the apprehension of these entities. A factor

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[247] "Djinn" [Jinn], *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat and J. Schacht, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 546.
[248] Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs and the intelligent World of the Jinn* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 13-31.
[249] Ibid., 1-12.
[250] See Qur'an 15 (*Al-Ĥijr*): 26-27, Qur'an 55 (*Ar-Raĥmān*): 15-15.
[251] Ibid., 7 *(Al-'A`rāf*): 27.
[252] El-Zein, *World of the Jinn,* 1-12.

enhancing this role is the association between the "airiness" of the jinn and the "the airiness" of odors.[253] Odors as vicarious agents give access to a world that is imperceptible to other human senses than smell. Their ability to transcend boarders transforms them into agents channeling the communication between two different ontological beings: humans and jinn.

In elegant French, in tune with his costume and his strong smell of perfume, the Sunni shaykh Muhammad started our discussion on the multifarious jinn by classifying them in two categories: the believer good jinn and the atheist evil ones.

> There are two types of jinn…one who is evil and another one who is a believer. The jinni who is a believer can be a Jewish, a Christian, a Muslim. The evil jinni is an atheist one, who can disturb people […] The believer jinni is one that does not bother, who can listen, who can be present and who respects every person.[254]

According to him, the level of involvement of these entities in the physical world was connected to their capacity for good and evil and their religious allegiance. The idea that it was the malevolent, trickster-type of jinni that mingled in the world and in the lives of humans was recurrently mentioned in my interviews with Sunni Muslims. This idea was in sharp contrast to their reassurance that the communication between the two realms is impossible in official Islam, as Man and jinni have two different ontological natures.

Odors are a physical characteristic often employed to convey the moral attributions of supernatural entities. In this sense, it is the evil spirits who are mostly portrayed as emitting foul odors.[255] Such is also the case with the evil jinn who tempt humans to sway away from the "straight path". Their nefarious presence is conveyed by the whiffs of foul odors. Here the olfactory conveys the presence of the materially absent and makes the connection with an ontologically different world. By smelling the foul odor, Rashid's family could sensorially apprehend the presence of a being that evades the other senses. Yet, smells

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[253] Classen, "The Odor of the Other," 149.
[254] Interview with Sunni shaykh Muhammad.
[255] Classen, "The Odor of the Other," 149-155.

have a paradoxical nature as they depend on a source but they also escape the form of that source.[256] The malodorous smells of the jinn make no exception, their extended presence leading to the creation of a smellscape circumscribed to an inhabited space such as one's home. For example, the same Sunni Shaykh received a request of help from a lawyer who believed that the persistent foul smellscape in his house was a sign for the presence of a malevolent jinni.

> Last week a lawyer called me and told me that his mother was touched by a jinni … since then, there is a foul odor in the house…and he thinks that it is the jinni that emanates that smell.[257]

Here the jinni caused changes and disturbed the natural order, acquiring the status of a "matter out of place."[258] In this frame, the foul odors do not only convey the presence of a nefarious jinni, but can also defile and pollute the domestic space.

As described above, the house of a Sunni Muslim is a focal point of his life. This representation of the domestic space as sacred materializes in a series of prescribed practices of purification or prevention. Righteous engagement in these religious ritualistic actions repels evil spirits such as the jinn and brands the house as a sacred space.[259] One technique of warding off intrusive, polluting odors is by using counteractive fragrances as means of purification. This is expressive of a larger tradition in different religions, where the struggle between God and Evil finds expression in a fight between the foul smell and the fragrant odor. For my respondents, the foul smell of jinn disrupts the habitual functioning of the domestic space and requires a series of prescribed corporeal and gestural practices to counteract the defilement.

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[256] Gell, "Magic, Perfume," 400-410.
[257] Interview with Sunni shaykh Muhammad.
[258] Douglas, *Purity and Danger,* 35-36.
[259] Campo, *The Other Sides of Paradise,* 3.

One of the counteractive practices that Rashid's family would use is incensing the homes with bukhūr. The sweet fragrance dispels the house of any foul odor that might be given by the presence of the jinn. This custom can stretch back to the Arabs of pre-Islam, who devised whole procedures to protect themselves from the evil actions of the jinn on their bodies, minds and in their house, such as the use of beads, incense, bones, salt or charms written in Arabic.[260] At the same time, Rashid's family would often employ bukhūr as a sign of hospitality to their guests, evaluating this custom in a frame of social etiquette. The same action acquired different functions. The element that made the difference between bukhūr as a sign of social greeting and bukhūr as a dispeller of jinn was the performance / recitation of the prophetic words of Qur'an. In other words, the same action, when framed in a scriptural semiotics, acquired a function of purification and protection.

> Bukhūr is not enough for protection or casting away evil spirits, but always comes with special formulas. By prayer and the Qur'an whose words are true, […] you cast away the evil jinn.[261]

Moreover, the practice of incensing is not only for chasing away the evil entities, but also for neutralizing any foul odor from the house. This preventive action is triggered by the folk belief that the foul smellscape conveying the presence of a jinni is fueled by sources of pollution from the material environment: places where rubbish is pilled, dark places in the house, foul odors of humans and animals. "The jinni eats everything that humans and animals produce, that is the reason why the jinn has this foul smell."[262] This statement of the Sunni shaykh Muhammad gives an insight into a smellscape where the sources of the foul smell of the jinn are grounded in the material, physical world. Since odors can never be entirely detached from their source, this smellscape intrinsically unites the realm of the jinn and the realm of humans.

[260] Djinn" [Jinn], Encyclopedia *of Islam*, 2nd ed., 546.
[261] Informal discussion with Umar, Executive Director of the Islam-Forum, January 5, 2015.
[262] Interview with Sunni shaykh Muhammad.

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Under this potential danger of domestic odoriferous pollution, burning bukhūr is only one of a larger palette of preventive measures mentioned by the Sunni respondents. These precautionary measures can also take the form of ritual gestural actions and sayings undertaken so as not to irritate the jinn. If the wrath of a jinni has been incurred, one would say a *bismillāh* ("In the name of Allah") or a *dastūr* ("with your permission").[263] The same formulae are to be said when entering one's home so as not to disturb the jinn. In this sense, Shaykh Muhammad stated "Yes, for example we say *dastūr,* a word which is not Arabic, to announce that we have arrived home.[264] Rashid's wife would sometimes use the same word when entering the house, even though she acknowledged it was a superstition and not "part of religion". By the phrase "not part of religion", she was referring to the usage of this word in practices of magic and divination, where spirits would be revered or controlled by specific formulae including the term *dastūr.* Yet, this word did not always have a spiritual or magic dimension. A word of Persian origin, it initially made reference to official constitutions and regulations and to individuals exercising them (e.g. counselors, governors). In its etymological evolution, this association with authority came to incorporate a spiritual aspect. For instance, the word came to be associated with Zoroastrian priesthood and Sufi meditation practices such as *dhikr.*[265] In colloquial Arabic, *dastūr* denotes permission, either from a person or an entity such as the jinn, hence the reference made by Rashid's wife. Nevertheless, when recounting these rituals of asking permission from the jinn, both her and the Sunni shaykh smiled and felt slightly embarrassed for engaging in such credulous actions. Their reaction was a reflection of the negotiation between the cognitive denial of their effectiveness and the habitual drive to enact these popular beliefs grounded in centuries of folk tradition.

[263] Ibid. and interview with Rashid, Sunni Muslim.
[264] Ibid.
[265] Mansour Shaki, "dastūr," *Encyclopaedia Iranica online,* accessed May 20, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dastur

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In conclusion, a shared olfactory imaginary governs the sensorial engagement of the Sunni Muslims that I interviewed with these invisible entities. In this imaginary, smell becomes a channel of communication between the world of Man and the invisible realm of the jinn. In its connective role, smell can acquire both a polluting and a purifying impact. While it is the foul odor of the evil jinn that pollutes the domestic space, it is the fragrant scent of burnt bukhūr that can ward it off. This incensing practice is part of a series of corporeal and gestural rituals that characterize the interaction with the jinn. Together with the officially prescribed rituals of worship, they punctuate the everyday life of believers such as Rashid and define the structure of their domestic space. I said goodbye to Rashid and his family, this time putting my right hand across my heart as a sign of gratitude, while the left was holding the many gifts that stood as a sign of their typical Arab hospitality.

IV.4. Let my Prayer Rise Before You Like Bukhūr….

The historically conditioned aromatic culture of Lebanon found expression in a rich usage of bukhūr not only in the liturgy or as a lucky charm for shopkeepers, but also in private forms of worship. Out of the walls of a church and out of the fragrant shops in Achrafieh, I step into the houses of Christian Beirutis who employ bukhūr in their private worship. Here I catch glimpses of the most intimate dimensions of this practice: the sensorial and the recollective. I investigate how practicing believers personalize the usage of bukhūr within the confinements of their homes, how they brand it as a conveyer of the sacred and how they embody their olfactory religious experiences.

During my interviews with Christians from the three religious denominations under research, the question that unanimously triggered surprise and faint smiles on their faces was “What are the first five words that come to your mind when I say bukhūr?” In this game of imagination that they had to perform, the majority of my respondents associated

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incense with prayer, grounding their decision in the authority of the Old and the New Testament. Among the most mentioned biblical references were Revelations 8:4 -"The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand." and Psalm 141:2 - "Let my prayer be set before You as incense / The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice".[266] This association might not come as a surprise taking into consideration that its history stretches as far back as the first centuries of Christianity.[267] The factor of surprise here is the spatial dimension. Interviewees would recurrently appeal to the incense-prayer association and to its traditional foundation to justify and explain their domestic usage of bukhūr. Unlike the liturgical frame where they experienced bukhūr as "the odor of Christ", their private worship was mainly characterized by a discourse on incense as an olfactory symbol for prayer.[268]

This traditional narrative of bukhūr as a sign for prayer was embodied by respondents and translated into recurrent sensorial experiences triggered by the sacred olfactory. An example of such a "translation" emerged during my interview with Father Alexios, from the Saint George Greek Orthodox Cathedral. In the upper chamber of the Cathedral, Father Alexios started the conversation by apologizing for not being able to offer me the ubiquitous Arabic coffee. A calm person in his late 40s, he frequently expressed regret for not being the appropriate person to offer me the "right" or the "correct" answers to my questions. On my inquiry into the usefulness of bukhūr during his moments of prayer, he creatively stated: "[…] as the incense must be burnt to be used so our prayer must be from

[266] New King James Version (NKJV)

[267] In the first centuries of Christianity, incense was mostly associated with pagan rituals of sacrifice. As a reaction, the Church Fathers translated this practice into a metaphorical discourse where the fragrant smoke of incense stood as symbol for prayers ascending to the divine. Once with the 4th century legalization of Christianity, incense was introduced in public and private Christian devotions, while it preserved its status as a symbol of prayer. For further details, see Béatrice Caseau "Incense and Fragrances: from House to Church. A Study of the Introduction of Incense in the Early Byzantine Christian Churches," in *Material Culture and Well-Being in Byzantium (400-1453)*, eds. M. Grünbart et al. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 75-91.

[268] There were other reasons mentioned too (e.g. purification or piety), yet the discourse on bukhūr as prayer was the most commonly brought forth.

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out heart…something hot….a hot prayer…which goes straight up."[269] Here, the smell of bukhūr acts as a channel of communication between two ontologically different beings: God and Man. As the incense is burnt and the fragrant smoke ascends, Father Alexios sensorially experiences the recited prayer as the uttered words give sway to an internalized prayer of the senses. This chain of transformations from material to immaterial, from external to internal, from uttered to felt authenticates the prayer. In other words, the objective of reaching a "hot heart" legitimizes and is legitimized by the intertwinement of bukhūr and the private moment of worship.

An intriguing aspect to be taken into consideration is the semantic field employed by Father Alexios, who would often use the terminology for burnt bukhūr to express his sensorial experience in prayer. The "hot" fire of the incense engenders a "hot" prayer of the heart and assures a passage from the external physical heat of the burnt incense to the spiritual fervency of the believer. "It is a human explanation of how we pray. As we put the incense over the fire to give the smoke, likewise we should pray…with a fever."[270] The communication with the sacred is assured not only by the rising fragrant smell of burnt incense, but also by the "thermic" sensorial reactions triggered by the olfactory (the odor) and the visual (the smoke). In this frame, bukhūr becomes a symbol of prayer when it reflects and is reflected by this sensorial attuning.

Another expression of the embodiment experience triggered by burnt bukhūr during prayer was expressed by the Maronite Father Yusuf. Upon describing the appropriate state of a believer during prayer, he declared: "Yes, yes…I am not cold….like the Revelation. To be cold is ok, but to be in the middle is not ok."[271] The citation that he was alluding to was Revelations 3:14-16, from where "hot", "cold", "lukewarm" become

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[269] Interview with Father Alexios, Saint George Greek Orthodox Cathedral.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Interview with Father Yusuf, from Saint George Maronite Cathedral, December 25, 2014.

sensorial modes that Father Yusuf experiences during the prayer and metonyms for the level of his engagement in the act of worship.

> And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: / "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. / So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth".[272]

Nevertheless, this hierarchy of sensorial modes stimulated during prayer moments and even the very association of bukhūr with prayer are conditioned by other factors that go beyond the actual act of worship and incensing. For example, Nada, who regularly burns bukhūr at home declared:

> **"**I have been to Yemen and I brought these crystals but I do not use them for prayers because I have incense from convents. I like it when people who cook the incense think of the process as holy…so the process can include the intention and the purpose. The other ones [the ones from Yemen], I feel they are profane…like you burn a stick from India."[273]

In this case, the association of bukhūr with the act of praying and the efficiency of its fragrant smoke in attuning the senses to the sacred depend on factors that extend beyond the temporal frame of daily prayers and the domestic space. Here a larger temporal and spatial network unfolds, where bukhūr is "effective" if the physical substance is prepared in an authorized sacred space such as a convent. The spatial dimension is complemented by the intention of the manufacturers, who must engage in the process of cooking the incense with a clear purpose of potential worship in their mind. In this sense, it is not only Nada's intention, but also a network of actions, individuals and space that contribute to the effectiveness of bukhūr in sensorially igniting her into a state of prayer. During collective, public forms of worship such as the liturgy, it is the authority of the priest and the authorized ritual that contribute to bukhūr being experienced as the presence of the sacred.

[272] New King James Version (NKJV).
[273] Interview with Nada, Rum Orthodox.

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Conversely, during private worship confined to the walls of one's home, these conditional factors are replaced by an authorized manufacturing process of bukhūr: from the space where it is produced to the individuals producing it.

When all the factors authorizing the efficacy of bukhūr during prayer are in place, the senses of the believer attune to the sacred smellscape created by the scented smell. "Sometimes I burn the incense from the church and I do not pray but put some chants…my mind does not pray, but my senses pray." In this case, Nada seems to sense, yet not make sense of the prayer moment, as the cognitive action of uttering the praying words is replaced by a direct somatic reaction. Here, bukhūr is not only a symbol of prayer, but becomes a form of prayer. The olfactory is accompanied by the aural as the sounds of the chants vicariously express the tone of the believer in prayer. What is more, these two sensorial dimensions are complemented by a process of spatial branding. In the house, incense is often burnt in front of the icons, the creation of the sacred smellscape revolving around a visual symbol of sacredness – the icon.

> But when I burn incense, I am praying for my dead parents, I am praying in front of the icons. For example, my aunt, burns incense every morning in front of the iconostasis – icons and pictures of all the deceased in the family.[274]

In this way a ritualistic aesthetics finds expression outside the liturgy and into the house of the believer. The aural, spatial and olfactory create a synesthetic experience similar to the one enacted within the authorized space of a church, but more personalized. For instance, the visual incentives are not only the icons of the saints, but also the pictures of relatives who have passed away.

Apart from this enacted ritual of individual prayer in the domestic space, a strong emotional and nostalgic character of the olfactory is attached to the private usage of bukhūr. Smells are not remembered, but recognized. If I wish to remember odors, I end up

[274] Ibid.

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recollecting images, spaces or particular individuals.[275] Try to remember the odor of incense and you will probably recollect a priest in a church where you smelled incense. What you will also recollect are people, places or situations that have had a strong emotional impact on you. That is because smells are emotional agents, rather than rational ones. In re-living olfactory experiences, memories and feelings are (re)created.[276] Such is the case with the fragrance of bukhūr outside the frames of liturgical or private worship.

For the Christians that I interviewed, be they priests or believers, the smell of bukhūr could trigger nostalgic memories with a multisensorial character. For Father Yusuf from the Saint George Maronite Cathedral, the smell of incense outside the authorized religious rituals acted retrospectively, transporting him back to his childhood. "I remember when I was a child and my parents would burn incense every time we wanted to pray, especially during the month of Mary, May." The present olfactory triggers a going back to an *I* in the *then* and *there*. In this case, it is the smell of bukhūr that takes him back to an *I* as a child, to a *then* as prayer time or the month of May, to a *there* as home. The case of the Reformed Reverend Ramez stands as evidence for the exceptional efficiency of the olfactory memory in the area of recognition. By his denominational affiliation to Reformed Protestantism, the Reverent does not use bukhūr in any form of worship. In spite of this lack of usage, the smell has not drifted from his memories for when smells disappear, memories remain.[277] A whiff of bukhūr instantly pitched him back into a biographical past: his childhood as a Catholic and the church where his father would take him every Sunday.

In conclusion, the private usage of bukhūr among Christians is characterized by a recurrent association between the fragrant smell and prayer. Within the confinements of their homes, the fragrant smoke of bukhūr becomes a symbol of adoration and a channel of

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[275] Pink, *Doing Sensorial Ethnography*, 75.
[276] Waskul, "The Aroma of Recollection," 5-22.
[277] Seremetakis, *The Senses Still.*

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communication with the divine. The efficiency of this channel is assured not only by the ascending smoke and the uttered prayers words, but also by the sensorial modes engendered in the believers. For the act of worship to be authenticated, an internal transformation must be sensorially triggered by the visual (fragrant smoke), aural (prayer) and olfactory (odor of bukhūr). What is more, outside the enacted ritual of prayer, the smell of incense can also act retrospectively. In the case of my respondents, its fragrant odor triggered memories of past events, persons and spaces important in their personal histories.

To sum up, this chapter swayed the reader to step out of the walls of a church or a mosque and out of the network of symbols enacted within the religious practices associated with these spaces. It swayed him to step into the dynamic urban culture of Beirut. Here smells associated with religious or profane objects and practices enticed the sensorium, standing as ephemeral yet enduring evidences for a sensorially rich Eastern Mediterranean culture. The same urban smellscape stood as evidence for the lingering confessional identities of the Beiruti neighborhoods. In its visual and olfactory markers of identification, the urban topography of Beirut still reflected the religious affiliation of its inhabitants. The same communal attachment was reflected in the socio-cultural narratives constructed by Beirutis. In this case, the olfactory became an instrument of social, economic and confessional evaluation, revealing a social hierarchy carved in a Christian-Muslim framework.

From the dynamic, bustling urban context of Beirut, the attention shifted on the domestic space and the usage of bukhūr in the Christian and Muslims forms of private worship. Here the olfactory became a medium that mediated encounters between different ontological levels. For instance, it was smell that intermediated and regulated the communication with the invisible world of the jinn. Nevertheless, this chapter mainly

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focused on the particular case of Rashid and his family. As such, it cannot engender pertinent conclusions on the Muslim appropriation of the Arabic imaginarium on jinn. Neither can it make a valid comparison with the Eastern Christian counterpart in the appropriation of the Arabic folk beliefs. For instance, it might well be the case that the belief in these entities is not confessionally-based, but rather connected to social status and education. For instance, Sunni shaykh Muhammad recurrently associated the jinn with practices of magic and divination performed by poor people in the mountainous rural areas of Lebanon. This brings forth not only the class specificity of these beliefs and practices, but also the urban-rural factor of differentiation. In this sense, how much these practices have a general confessional character, or are regional and class specific, remains open to further research.

The olfactive practices of worship performed by Christians in their homes engender sensational forms where bukhūr was understood and experienced as a form of prayer. Interestingly, this holistic experience of incense was dependent not only on the intention of the believer, but also on factors such as the provenance of the substance or the intention of its manufacturers. In the end, by having focused on the construction of these urban and domestic smellscapes, this chapter contributes to a more comprehensive picture on the multifarious nature of the olfactory.

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Chapter V. Reflections on the Study of the (Sacred) Olfactory.

At the beginning of this study I posed the question of how scholarly research can be conducted on the sensorial and, more particularly, on the olfactory. How can one engage in the study of the intimate nature of perception and the ephemeral character of odors? In search for potential answers, I looked into what smells hint at as vicarious agents and into their lingering effects. In other words, transient odors were pinned on paper by researching the actions, the beliefs and the narratives that they engender. More particularly, I focused on the sacred osmologies of four religious communities – Maronite, Rum Orthodox, Reformed Protestant and Sunni Muslim – in the multiconfessional environment of present-day Beirut. Here the attention to a seemingly minor element such as bukhūr provided insights into how these communities engage the olfactory in intra- and inter- confessional interaction. My three-week field research did not allow for a comprehensive study of the sensorial aesthetics of Beirut and its religious, cultural and historical dimensions. Yet, it did bring forth potential lines of further research on the olfactory, which will briefly be presented here.

One stimulating line of inquiry is the spatial dimension inherent to the cyclical usage of fragrant substances. In this study, I showed how smells end up fitting in a certain place by repetitive employment, despite their fragmentary nature in time and space. This aspect of odors as branding agents is pregnant in the frame of religious rituals grounded in tradition and perfected by centuries of practice. The synesthetic liturgies of the Maronite and the Rum Orthodox Christians are two official contexts where these smellscapes come to life. Here the rich censing of bukhūr engenders authorized olfactory "–scapes" that engage the material environment within churches, the religious communities and the divine.

Within the walls of a Maronite or a Rum Orthodox church, the smellscape created is trademarked by a religious tradition, but also negotiated by the participants in the

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unfolding liturgy. For instance, bukhūr as a symbol of the "odor of Christ" is sensorially experienced by believers as the actual manifestation of the transcendent. As they live the liturgy, the physical smell of this substance transforms into the most beautiful fragrance in the world: "the odor of the divine". In this metamorphosis, it triggers a series of sensational forms that unite those attending the liturgy in one community as the "bride of Christ". An expression of these forms is the collective engagement of the believers in the choreography of prescribed movements and words. Yet, for an authentic religious experience, this attuning of the body must give sway to an internal transformation. The latter implies a moral dimension where predispositions for ethical behavior and prayer take hold on those who immerse into the liturgical smellscape.

Moreover, the definition of a sacred smellscape can be expanded by further research into the fragrant practices of Sunni Muslims. Their preference for the usage of bukhūr as perfume engenders another potential "-scape" for odors, namely the human body. Interestingly, instead of the physical space of a mosque, it is rather the body in terms of performative actions that becomes a "territory" for the sacred olfactory. Two potential explanations in need of further research can be brought forth in this case. Firstly, prayer in Islam is not confined to the material space of a mosque, but rather to a state of physical and spiritual cleanliness. Secondly, the olfactory aesthetics of Sunni Muslims is expressive of a worldview where odors regulate both the communication with the divine and the social interactions of the *umma.* This worldview is grounded in the scriptural authority of the Qur'an and hadith, where it encompasses both a social and a religious dimension. In this frame, scented fragrances become strongly expressive of both social propriety and spiritual cleanliness. Conversely, foul odors and impurity become menacing not only for the individual as a Sunni Muslim, but for the welfare and cohesion of the community.

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A similar emphasis on the body "-scape" in terms of performative actions was reflected in the case of the Arab Reformed Protestants. The native Protestant community in Beirut developed within the rich olfactory culture of the Eastern Mediterranean region. Its history is entwined to the multiconfessional environment of Lebanon, where a significant number of religious traditions use bukhūr in their worship practices. One expression of these specificities was the way Arab Protestants appropriated the discourse on the "odor of Christ". In their case, the source of "the most beautiful smell in the world" was not bukhūr, but rather the ethical behavior of the believer. His intention and internal motivations replaced the external, physical smell of incense as a conveyer of the divine and as a proof of moral uprightness.

Another potential direction of investigation that stems from this research is the connection between olfaction and memory. This association has been extensively investigated in areas such as cognitive science or biology. Yet, its research in the field of religious studies would make a valuable contribution to the interdisciplinary perspective on the human sensorium. For instance, the sacred olfactory can acquire both an anticipatory and a retrospective character. During the Rum Orthodox liturgy branded as a short-lived replica of Heaven, the smell of bukhūr attuned the mind of the believers towards an eternal future to come. In other words, the olfactory triggered what I call "memories of the future", glimpses in a future branded by a liturgical tradition grounded in an authoritative past. These memories were collectively "remembered" by the community of believers as the liturgy unfolded.

Conversely, outside the church as both physical space and enacted ritual, the same smell of bukhūr can acquire a retrospective character, acting as an external incentive for inner recollections. In this instance, smell swayed the believers into remembering feelings and situations that they had experienced in the past. Yet, the status of bukhūr as a "travel

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agent" into bygone times did not resume to the personal histories of the believers or to the sacred space. The same fragrance engendered memories of the vicissitudes of the 1975-1990 Civil War. Then the church was seen as a safe haven against the tribulations of the armed conflict. It was inside this place of worship where the foul smells of gunpowder and fear were traded for the fragrant odors of bukhūr and peace.

Last but not least, a sphere of research that clearly reveals the historical and cultural contingency of the olfactory is its "ability" to reflect communal identification and differentiation. In this sense, sacred smells become branding instruments not only for confessional affiliation, but also for educational and social status. In the case of Beirut, the multifarious character of sacred odors is to be investigated by looking into its cultural and historical particularities. Firstly, this Arab metropolis of the East is part of an olfactory aesthetics different from what Alain Corbin would call a sanitized, "deodorized" European society. Under the influence of the Eastern Mediterranean culture, the Lebanese society is expressive of a rich olfactory and a love of perfumes, incense and other fragrant enhancers. Secondly, the Civil War of 1975-1990 strengthened the cleavages stimulated by differences in religious beliefs, the lingering effects being visible in the societal fabric and urban topography of present-day Beirut. In the frame of these Lebanese particularities, the sacred olfactory can become an element of social and economic evaluation, reflecting a confessionally cohesive or fragmented society.

In the end, these three directions of inquiry were the primary, yet not exclusive, ones explored in this study. Brought together, they revealed that the sensorium represents a fertile ground of scholarly inquiry, yet not properly explored. In this sense, I trust that this research will contribute to building up a coherent and solid foundation for the future research on the sacred olfactory and its ephemeral agents – the odors.

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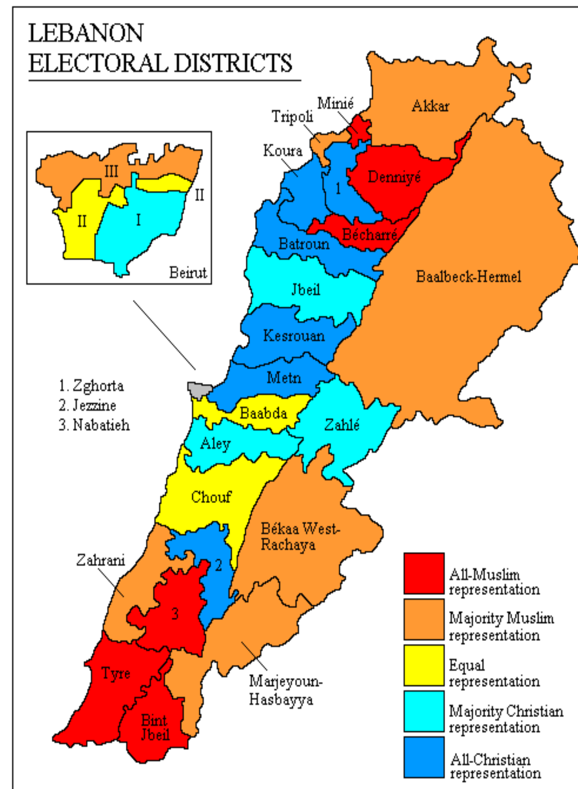
Appendices

Appendix 1

Subject: The variety of bukhūr and the home censer of a Rum Orthodox Christian.
Source: Personal archive

Appendix 2

Subject: Map of the Republic of Lebanon + Map with the confessional electorate of Lebanon (2005 electorate distribution)
Sources: http://www.ccfrancolibanaise.com/images/lebanonBigMap.jpg
http://psephos.adam-carr.net/countries/l/lebanon/lebanonmaps.shtml



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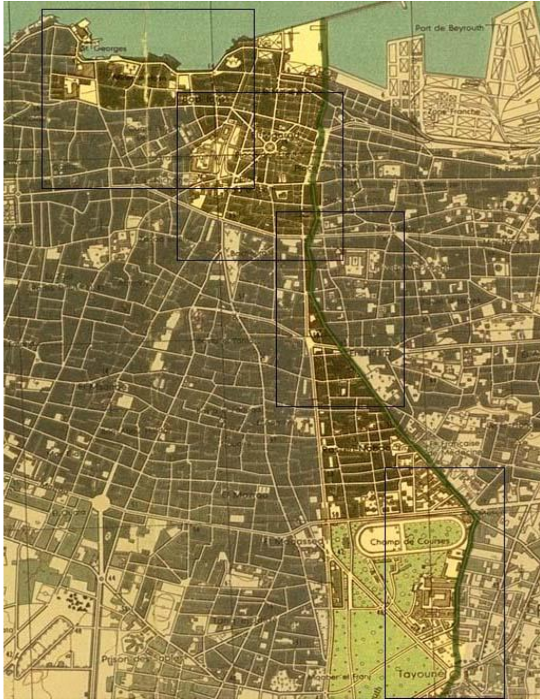
Appendix 3

Subject: The Green Line separating East from West Beirut, during the 1975-1990 Civil War

Source:http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/900/910/919.other_areas_and_worlds/beirut/greenline/beirut-maps/beirut-gl-2.jpg



Appendix 4

Subject: Saint George Maronite Cathedral in Beirut, Christmas midnight liturgy (December 24, 2014)

Source: Personal archive.

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Appendix 5
Subject: Saint Mary's Orthodox Church of Dormition, Christmas liturgy (December 25, 2014) & The incense procession within baptism liturgy in a Greek Orthodox Church in Beirut (December 27, 2014).
Source: Personal archive.

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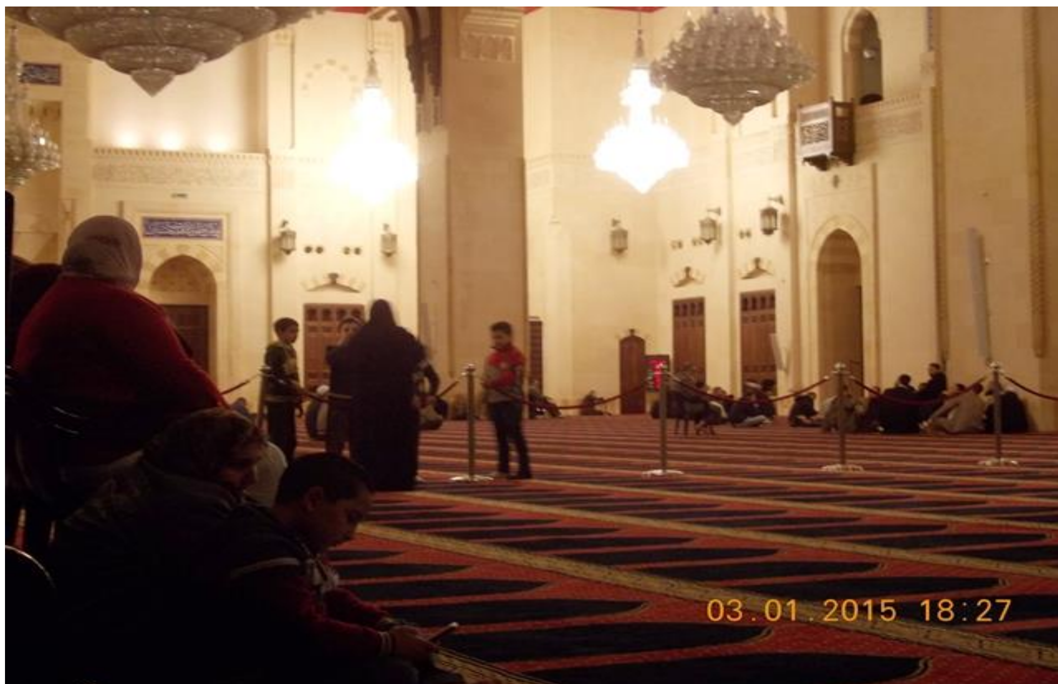
Appendix 6.
Subject: The National Evangelical Church of Beirut
Source: ems-online.org

Appendix 7.
Subject: Muhammad al-Amin Mosque in Beirut, Birth of the Prophet (*Mawlid al-Nabī*) & A small library within the mosque.
Source: Personal archive



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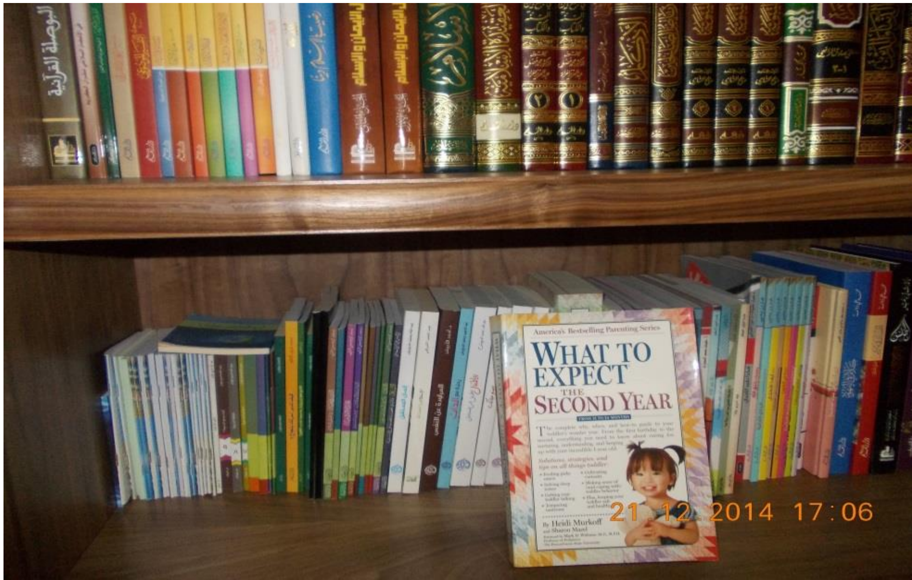

Appendix 8
Subject: Beirut Central District (BCD)
Source: Personal archive

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Appendix 9

Subject: Zarif and “Muslim” braded areas
Source: Personal archive

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Appendix 10
Subject: “Sanitized” spaces of Beirut Central District
Source: Personal archive

Appendix 11
Subject: Achrafieh and “Christian” braded areas.
Source: Personal archive

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Nada, Rum Orthodox believer. ____________ Individual interview Beirut (private house). December 23, 2014.

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Muhammad, Sunni Sheikh. ____________ Individual interview. Beirut (court magistrate's office). January 2, 2015.

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These interviews were semi-structured and sound recorded. One exception is the interview with Father Nicola, who kindly refused to be recorded. The transcriptions are in the private archive of the author. Also, the real names of the interviewees were changed, for matters of confidentiality.

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These private conversations were not recorded and they were not pre-scheduled.

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